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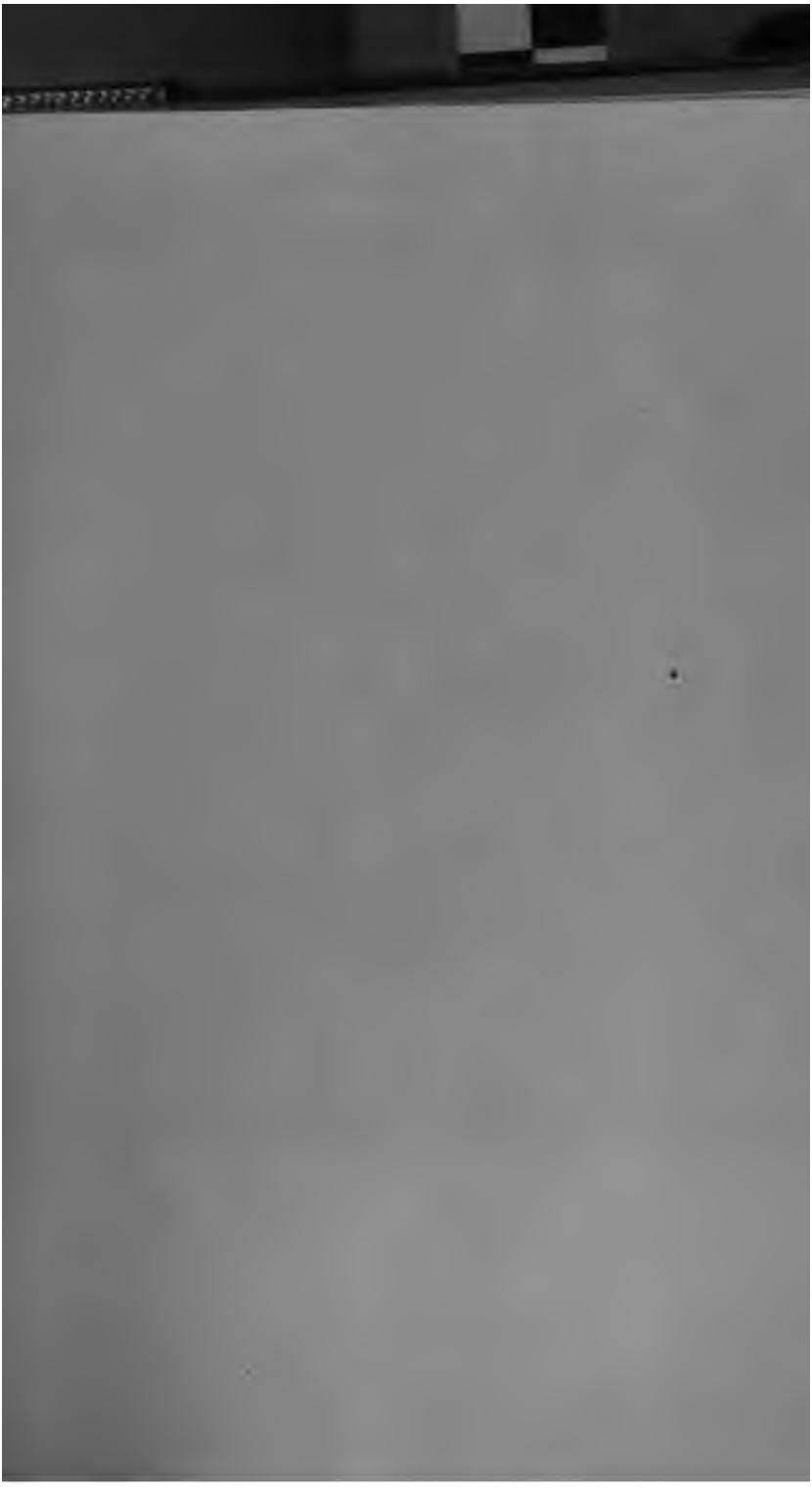
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AMENITIES OF LITERATURE,

CONSISTING OF

SKETCHES AND CHARACTERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY ISAAC DISRAELI.

A New Edition,

EDITED BY HIS SON,

THE RIGHT HON. B. DISRAELI,

CHANCELLOR OF HER MAJESTY'S EXCHEQUER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

HISTORY of our vernacular literature has occupied my stu-
s for many years. It was my design, not to furnish an arid
rrative of books or of authors, but, following the steps of
: human mind through the wide track of Time, to trace
)m their beginnings the rise, the progress, and the decline
public opinions, and to illustrate, as the objects presented
.emselves, the great incidents in our national annals.

In the progress of these researches, many topics presented themselves, some of which, from their novelty and curiosity, courted investigation. Literary history, in this enlarged circuit, becomes not merely a philological history of critical erudition, but ascends into a philosophy of books, where their subjects, their tendency, and their immediate or gradual influence over the people, discover their actual condition.

Authors are the creators or the creatures of opinion: the great form an epoch, the many reflect their age. With them the transient becomes permanent, the suppressed lies open; and they are the truest representatives of their nation for those very passions with which they are themselves infected. The pen of the ready writer transmits to us the public and the domestic story, and thus books become the intellectual history of a people. As authors are scattered through all the ranks of society, among the governors and the governed, and the objects of their pursuits are usually carried on by their own peculiar idiosyncrasy, we are deeply interested in the secret connection of the incidents of their lives with their intellectual

habits. In the development of that predisposition which is ever working in characters of native force, all their felicities and their failures, and the fortunes which such men have shaped for themselves, and often for the world, we discover what is not found in biographical dictionaries, — the history of the mind of the individual; and this constitutes the psychology of genius.

In the midst of my studies, I was arrested by the loss of sight: the papers in this collection are a portion of my projected history.

The title prefixed to this work has been adopted to connect it with its brothers, the "Curiosities of Literature," and "Miscellanies of Literature;" but, though the form and manner bear a family resemblance, the subject has more unity of design.

The propriety of the title, I must confess, depends on the graciousness of my readers: the diversified literature in which I have so long indulged is of such late origin in this country, that the species has never obtained a name. Blair entitles his work "Lectures on Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres;*" and Goldsmith, in his review of the modern literature of Europe, calls it "*polite learning.*" The Italians have been more fortunate in describing this class as *la letteratura amena;* and, if it were required to place a classical seal on the term, we might appeal to Pliny, who has given it to literary pursuits in general, *amœnitates studiorum.*

These volumes are not addressed to learned antiquaries, to whose stores it is so difficult to add: I stand gratefully indebted to their labors; for, though I have sometimes held a sickle in their harvest, I am oftener a gleaner in their fields: these volumes are designed for those of my contemporaries, who, amid the diversified acquisitions of this age in science and in art,

some of which had no existence with the public in my youth, are still susceptible of inquiries so intimately connected with the progress of the human mind and of society, which should never be separated. Whoever imagines that he may safely lay aside all the successive efforts of the English mind, as fashions out of date, contracts his faculties within his own day, and can form no adequate conception of that ample inheritance of the intellectual powers bequeathed to us from age to age. To be ignorant of all antiquity is a mutilation of the human mind: it is early associations and local circumstances which give a bent to the mind of a people from their infancy, and insensibly constitute the nationality of genius, separating the manners and feelings of neighboring nations. Even the errors or singularities of our predecessors, the sagacious know, become so many accessions to their experimental knowledge; and, in whatever is excellent, the impulses of our predecessors stand connected with our own. We but continue the chain of human sympathies, whose remotest link, be it ever so backward, supports what is now around us.

There is one more remark in which I must indulge: the author of the present work is denied the satisfaction of reading a single line of it; yet he flatters himself that he shall not trespass on the indulgence he claims for any slight inadvertences. It has been confided to ONE whose eyes unceasingly pursue the volume for him who can no more read, and whose eager hand traces the thought ere it vanish in the thinking; but it is only a father who can conceive the affectionate patience of filial devotion.



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AMENITIES OF LITERATURE.

THE DRUIDICAL INSTITUTION.

ENGLAND, which has given models to Europe of the most masterly productions in every class of learning and every province of genius, so late as within the last three centuries was herself destitute of a national literature. Even enlightened Europe itself, amid the revolving ages of time, is but of yesterday.

How "that was performed in our tongue, which may be compared or preferred either to insolent Greece or haughty Rome,"* becomes a tale in the history of the human mind.

In the history of an insular race, and in a site so peculiar as our own, a people whom the ocean severed from all nations, where are we to seek for our ABORIGINES? A Welsh triad — and a Welsh is presumed to be a British — has commemorated an epoch when these mighty realms were a region of impenetrable forests and impassable morasses, and their sole tenants were wolves, bears, and beavers, and wild cattle. Who were the first human beings in this lone world?

Every people have had a fabulous age. Priests and poets invented, and traditionists expatiated. We discover gods who seem to have been men, or men who resemble gods. We read

* Ben Jonson.

in the form of prose what had once been a poem. Imaginations so wildly constructed, and afterwards so strangely allegorized, served as the milky food of the children of society, quieting their vague curiosity, and circumscribing the illimitable unknown. The earliest epoch of society is unapproachable to human inquiry. Greece, with all her ambiguous poetry, was called "the mendacious;" credulous Rome rested its faith on five centuries of legends; and our Albion dates from that unhistorical period, when, as our earliest historian, the Monk of Monmouth, aiming at probability, affirms, "there were but a few giants in the land,"* and these the more melancholy Gildas, to familiarise us with hell itself, accompanied by "a few devils." Every people, however, long acknowledged, with national pride, beings as fabulous, in those tutelary heroes who bore their own names.

The landing of Brutus with his fugitive Trojans on "the White Island," and here founding a "Troynovant," was one of the results of the immortality of Homer, though it came reflected through his imitator, Virgil, whose Latin, in the mediæval ages, was read when Greek was unknown. The landing of Æneas on the shores of Italy, and the pride of the Romans in their Trojan ancestry, as their flattering epic sanctioned, every modern people, in their jealousy of antiquity, eagerly adopted, and claimed a lineal descent from

* The existence of these *giants* was long historical, and their real origin was in the fourth verse of the fifth chapter of Genesis, which no commentator shall ever explain. AYLET SAMMES, in his "Britannia Antiqua Illustrata, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain derived from the Phœnicians," has particularly noticed "two teeth of a certain giant, of such a huge bigness that two hundred such teeth as men now-a-days have might be cut out of them." Becanus and Camden had, however, observed that "*the bones of sea-fish* had been taken for *giants' bones*; but can it be rationally supposed that men ever entombed fishes?" triumphant in his arguments, exclaims Aylet Sammes. The revelations of geology had not yet been surmised, even by those who had discovered that giants were but sea-fish So progressive is all human knowledge.

some of this spurious progeny of Priam. The idle humor of the learned flattered the imaginations of their countrymen; and each in his own land raised up a fictitious personage, who was declared to have left his name to the people. The excess of their patriotism exposed their forgeries, while every pretended Trojan betrayed a Gothic name. France had its Francion; Ireland, its Iberus; the Danes, their Danus; and the Saxons, their Saxo. The descent of Brutus into Britain is even tenderly touched by so late a writer as our CAMDEN; for, while he abstains from affording us either denial or assent, he expends his costly erudition in furnishing every refutation which had been urged against the preposterous existence of these fabulous founders of every European people.

Such is the corruption of the earliest history, either to gratify the idle pride of a people, or to give completeness to inquiries extending beyond human knowledge. Even BUCHANAN, to gratify the ancestral vanity of his countrymen, has recorded the names of three hundred fabulous monarchs, and presents a nomenclature without an event; and, in his classical Latinity, we must silently drop a thousand unhistorical years. Even HENRY and WHITAKER, in the gravity of English history, sketched the manners and the characteristics of an unchronicled generation from the fragmentary romances of Ossian.

Cæsar imagined that the inhabitants of the interior of Britain, a fiercer people than the dwellers on the coasts, were an indigenous race; but the philosophy of Cæsar did not exceed that of Horace and Ovid, who conceived no other origin of man than *Mater Terra*. Man, indeed, was formed out of "the dust of the ground;" but the Divine Spirit alone could have dictated the history of primeval man in the solitude of Eden. To Cæsar was not revealed that man was an Oriental creature; that a single locality served as the cradle of the human race; and that the generations of man were

the offspring of a single pair, when once "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech." "And there is no antiquity but this that can tell *any other beginning*," exclaims our honest VERSTEGAN, exulting in his Teutonic blood, while furnishing an extraordinary evidence of the retreat of Tuisco and his Teutons from the conspiracy against the skies.*

The dispersion of Babel, and consequently the diversity of languages, is the mysterious link which connects sacred and profane history. There is but a single point whence human nature begins, — the universe has been populated by migrations. Wherever the human being is found, he has been transplanted. However varied in structure and dissimilar in dialect, the first inhabitants of every land were not born there; unlike plants and animals, which seem coeval with the region in which they are found, never removing from the soil they occupy. Thus the miracle of Holy Writ solves the enigmas of philosophical theories, of more than one Adam, of distinct stocks of mankind, and of the mechanism of language, — vague conjectures and contested opinions, which have left us without even a conception how the human being

* The miraculous event was perpetuated by the whole Teutonic people, "while it was fresh in their memories," as our honest Saxon asserts: hence, to this day, we in our Saxon *English*, and our Teutonic kinsmen and neighbors in their idiom, describe a confusion of idle talk by the term of *Babel*, — now written, from our harsh love of supernumerary consonants, *Babble*; and any such workmen of Babel are still indicated as *Babblers*. — "A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence," 138, 4to. Antwerp, 1605.

The erudite Menage offers a memorable evidence of the precarious condition of etymology when it connects things which have no other affinity than that which depends on *sounds*. — See his "Dictionnaire Etymologique, ou Origines de la Langue Françoise," *ad verbum* BABIL. Not satisfied with the usual authorities deduced from *Babel*, this verbal sage appeals to us English to demonstrate the natural connection between *Babbling* and *Childishness*; for thus, he has shrewdly opined, "the English in this manner have *Babble* and *Baby!*"

After all the convulsion of lips at Babel, and confusion among the etymologists, the word is Hebrew, which, with a few more such, are found in many languages.

is white or tawny or sable; or how the first letters of the alphabet are Aleph and Bêt, or Alpha and Beta, or A and B!

In tracing the origin of nations, later speculators have therefore more discreetly, though not wanting in hardy conjectures or fanciful affinities, conducted people after people from the mysterious fount of human existence in the Asian region. Through countless centuries they have followed the myriads, who, propelling each other, took the right or the left, as chance led them. Vanished nations may have received names which they themselves might not have recognized. Kelt or Kimmerian, Scandinavian or Goth, Phœnician or Iberian, have been hurried to the isles of Britain. Their tale is older, though less "divine," than the tale of Troy; and the difficulty remains to unravel the reality of the fabulous. The learned have rarely satisfied their consciences in arranging their dates in the confusion of unnoted time; nor in that other confusion of races, often mingling together under one common appellative, have they always agreed in assigning that ancient people who were the progenitors of the modern nation; and the aborigines have been more than once described as "an ancient people whose name is unknown." In the pride of erudition, and the irascibility of confutation, they have involved themselves in interminable discussions: yet one might be seduced to adopt any hypothesis; for, more or less, each bears some ambiguous evidence or some startling circumstance sufficient to rock the dreaming antiquary, and to kindle the bitter blood of pedantic patriots. The origin of the population of Europe and the first inhabitants of our British isles has produced some antiquarian romances, often ingenious and amusing, till the romances turn out to be mere polemics, and give us angry words amid the most quaint fancies. This theme, still continued, becomes a cavern of antiquity, where, many waving their torches, the light has sometimes fallen on an unperceived angle; but the scattered light has shown the depth and the darkness.

Among those shadows of time, we grasp at one certainty. Whoever might be the first-comers to this solitary island, when we obtain any knowledge of the inhabitants, we are struck by their close resemblance to those tribes of savage life whom our navigators have discovered, and who are now found in almost a primitive state, among that innumerable cluster of what has recently been designated the Polynesian Isles. The aborigines of Britain took the same modes of existence, and fell into similar customs. We discover their rude population divided into jealous tribes, in perpetual battle with one another. They lived in what Hobbes has called the *status belli*, with no notion of the *meum* and *tuum;* in the same community of their women as was found in Otaheite;* and with the same ignorance of property, when its representative in some form was not yet invented. Our aborigines resembled these races even in their personal appearance. A Polynesian chief has been drawn and colored after the life; and the figure exhibits the perfect picture of an ancient Briton, almost naked, the body painted red. The British savage chose blue, and made deep incisions in the flesh to insert his indelible woad.†

* Julia, the empress of Severus, once in raillery remonstrated with a British female against this singular custom, which annulled every connubial tie. The British woman, whose observation had evidently been enlarged during her visit to Rome, retorted by her disdain of the more polished corruption of the greater nation. "We British women greatly differ from the Roman ladies; for we follow in public the men whom we esteem the most worthy, while the Roman women yield themselves secretly to the vilest of men."

Such was the noble sentiment which broke forth from a lady of savage education. It was, however, but a savage's view of social life. This female Briton had not felt how much remained of life which she had not taken into her view. When the attractions of her sex had ceased, and the season of flowers had passed, she was left without her connubial lord, amid a progeny who had no father.

† This practice of savage races may have originated in a natural circumstance. The naked body, by this slight covering, is protected from the atmosphere, from insects, and other inconveniences to which the unclothed are exposed. But though it may not have been considered merely as personal finery, which seems sometimes to have been the case, it became a

The fierce eye and the bearded lip, with the long hair scattered to the waist, exhibit the Briton as he was seen by Cæsar, and, a century afterwards, as the British monarch Caractacus appeared before the Emperor Claudius at Rome. His sole ornaments consisted of an iron collar and an iron girdle; but as his naked majesty had his skin painted with figures of animals, however rudely, this was probably a distinctive dress of British royalty. These Britons lived in thick woods, herding among circular huts of reed, as we find other tribes in this early state of society; and submissive to the absolute dominion of a priesthood of magicians, as we find even among the Esquimaux; and performing sanguinary rites similar to those of the ancient Mexicans. We are struck with the conviction, that men in a parallel condition remain but uniform beings.

It seems a solecism in the intellectual history of man to discover among such a semi-barbarous people a government of sages, who, we are assured, "invented and taught such philosophy and other learning as were never read of nor heard of by any men before."* This paradoxical incident deepens in mystery when we are to be taught that the Druidical institution of Britain was Pythagorean or patriarchal or Brahminical. The presumed encyclopedic knowledge which this order possessed, and the singular customs which they practised, have afforded sufficient analogies and affinities to maintain the occult and remote origin of Druidism. Nor has this notion been the mere phantom of modern system-makers. It was a subject of inquiry among the ancients, whether the Druids had received

refinement of barbarism when they painted their bodies frightfully to look terrible to the enemy.

* See Mr. Tate's twelve questions about the Druids, with Mr. Jones's answers; a learned Welsh scholar, who commented on the ancient laws of his nation. — TOLAND'S *History of the Druids.*

A later Welsh scholar affirms, "Beyond all doubt, there has been an era when science diffused a light among the Cymry, in a very early period of the world." — OWEN'S *Heroic Elegies of Llywarç Hen.* Preface, xxi.

This style is traditional, and still kept up among Welsh and Irish scholars, who seem familiar with an antiquity beyond record.

their singular art of teaching by secret initiation, and the prohibition of all writing, with their doctrine of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls, from Pythagoras; or whether this philosopher, in his universal travels, had not alighted among the Druids, and had passed through their initiation.* This discussion is not yet obsolete, and it may still offer all the gust of novelty. A Welsh antiquary, according to the spirit of Welsh antiquity, insists that the Druidical system of the Metempsychosis was conveyed to the Brahmins of India by a former emigration from Wales; but the reverse may have occurred, if we trust the elaborate researches which copiously would demonstrate that the Druids were a scion of the Oriental family.† Every point of the Druidical history, from its mysterious antiquity, may terminate with reversing the proposition. A recent writer confidently intimated that the knowledge of Druidism must be searched for in the Talmudical writings; but another, in return, asserts that the Druids were older than the Jews.

Whence and when the British Druids transplanted themselves to this lone world amid the ocean, bringing with them all the wisdom of far antiquity to an uncivilized race, is one of those events in the history of man which no historian can write. It is evident that they long preserved what they had brought; since the Druids of Gaul were fain to resort to the Druids of Britain to renovate their instruction.

The Druids have left no record of themselves; they seem to have disdained an immortality separate from the existence

* Toland's "History of the Druids," in his Miscellaneous Works, ii. 168.

† "The Celtic Druids, or an Attempt to show that the Druids were the Priests of Oriental Colonies, who emigrated from India." By Godfrey Higgins, Esq. London, 1829.

This is a quarto volume abounding with recondite researches and many fancies. It is more repulsive, by the absurd abuse of "the Christian priests who destroyed their (the Druids') influence, and unnerved the arms of their gallant followers." There are philosophical fanatics.

of their order: but the shadow of their glory is reflected for ever in the verse of Lucan and the prose of Cæsar. The poet imagined, that, if the knowledge of the gods was known to man, it had been alone revealed to these priests of Britain. The narrative of the historian is comprehensive: but, with all the philosophical cast of his mind and the intensity of his curiosity, Cæsar was not a Druid;* and only a Druid could have written, had he dared, on DRUIDHEACHT, — a sacred, unspeakable word, at which the people trembled in their veneration.

The British Druids constituted a sacred and a secret society, religious, political, and literary. In the rude mechanism of society in a state of pupilage, the first elements of government, however gross or even puerile, were the levers to lift and to sustain the unhewn masses of the barbaric mind. Invested with all privileges and immunities, amid that transient omnipotence which man in his first feeble condition can confer, the wild children of society crouched together before those illusions which superstition so easily forges. But the supernatural dominion lay in the secret thoughts of the people: the marauder had not the daring to touch the open treasure as it lay in the consecrated grove; and a single word from a Druid for ever withered a human being, "cut down like grass." The loyalty of the land was a religion of wonder and fear, and to dispute with a Druid was a state crime.

They were a secret society, for whatever was taught was forbidden to be written; and not only their doctrines and

* Cæsar was a keen observer of the Britons. He characterizes the Kentish men, *Ex his omnibus longè sunt humanissimi*, — "Of all this people, the Kentish are far the most humane." Cæsar describes the British boats to have the keel and masts of the lightest wood, and their bodies of wicker covered with leather: and the hero and sage was taught a lesson by the barbarians; for Cæsar made use of these in Spain to transport his soldiers, — a circumstance which Lucan has recorded. In the size and magnitude of Britain, confiding to the exaggerated accounts of the captives, he was mistaken; but he acknowledges, that many things he heard of, he had not himself observed.

their sciences were veiled in this sacred obscurity, but the laws which governed the community were also oral. For the people, the laws, probably, were impartially administered: for the Druids were not the people; and, without their sympathies, these judges at least sided with no party. But if these sages, amid the conflicting interests of the multitude, seemed placed above the vicissitudes of humanity, their own more solitary passions were the stronger, violently compressed within a higher sphere. Ambition, envy, and revenge, those curses of nobler minds, often broke their dreams. The election of an arch-Druid was sometimes to be decided by a battle. Some have been chronicled by a surname which indicates a criminal. No king could act without a Druid by his side, for peace or war were on his lips; and, whenever the order made common cause, woe to the kingdom! * It was a terrible hierarchy. The golden knife which pruned the mistletoe beneath the mystic oak immolated the human victim.

The Druids were the common fathers of the British youth, for they were the sole educators; but the genius of the order admitted of no inept member. For the acolyte unendowed with the faculty of study, all initiation ceased: Nature herself had refused this youth the glory of Druidism; but he was taught the love of his country. The Druidical lyre kindled patriotism through the land, and the land was saved — for the Druids!

The Druidical custom of unwritten instruction was ingeniously suggested by Cicero, as designed to prevent their secret doctrines from being divulged to those unworthy or ill fitted to receive them, and to strengthen the memory of their votaries by its continued exercise: but we may suspect, that this barbarous custom of this most ancient sodality began at a period when they themselves neither read nor wrote, destitute of an

* Toland's "Hist. of the Druids," 56.

alphabet of their own; for, when the Druids had learned from the Greeks their characters, they adopted them in all their public and private affairs. We learn that the Druidical sciences were contained in twenty thousand verses, which were to prompt their perpetual memory. Such traditional science could not be very progressive: what was to be got by rote no disciple would care to consider obsolete, and a century might elapse without furnishing an additional couplet. The Druids, like some other institutions of antiquity, by not perpetuating their doctrines or their secrets in this primeval state of theology and philosophy by writing, have effectually concealed their own puerile simplicity; but the monuments of a people remain to perpetuate their character. We may judge of the genius or state of the Druidical arts and sciences by such objects. We are told that the Druids were so wholly devoted to nature, that they prohibited the use of any tool in the construction of their rude works: all are unhewn masses, or heaps of stones. Such are their cairns and cromleches and corneddes, and that wild architecture whose stones hang on one another, still frowning on the plains of Salisbury.* A circle of stones marked the consecrated limits of the Druidical tribunal; and,

* The origin of Stonehenge is as unknown as that of the Pyramids. As it is evident that those huge masses could not have been raised and fixed without the machinery of art, Mr. Owen, the Welsh antiquary, infers that this building (if such it may be called) could not have been erected till that later period when the Druidical genius declined and submitted to Christianity, and the Druids were taught more skilful masonry in stone, though without mortar. It has been, however, considered that those masses which have been ascribed to the necromancer Merlin, or the more ancient giants, might have been the work of the Britons themselves, who, without our knowledge of the mechanical powers in transporting or raising ponderous bodies, it is alleged were men of mighty force and stature, whose co-operation might have done what would be difficult even to our mechanical science. The lances, helmets, and swords of these Britons show the vast size and strength of those who wore them. The native Americans, as those in Peru, unaided by the engines we apply to those purposes, have raised up such vast stones in building their temples, as the architect of the present time would not perhaps hazard the attempt to remove. — *Essays by a Society at Exeter*, 114.

in the midst, a hillock heaped up for the occasion was the judgment-seat. Here, in the open air, — in "the eye of light and the face of the sun," to use the bardic style, — the decrees were pronounced, and the Druids harangued the people. Such a scene was exhibited by the Hebrew patriarchs, from whom some imagined these Druids descended: but whether or not the Celtic be of this origin, we must not decide by any analogous manners or customs, because these are nearly similar wherever we trace a primitive race; so uniform is Nature, till Art, infinitely various, conceals Nature herself.

In the depth of antiquity, misty superstition and pristine tradition gave a false magnitude to the founders of human knowledge; and our own literary historians, who have been over-curious about "the Genesis" of their antiquities, have inveigled us into the mystic groves of Druidism in all their cloudy obscurity. The "Antiquities of the University of Oxford" open with "the Originals of Learning in this Nation;" and our antiquary discerns the first shadowings of the University of Oxford in "the universal knowledge" of the Druidical institution in "ethics, politics, civil law, divinity, and poetry." Such are the reveries of an antiquary.

BRITAIN AND THE BRITONS.

BRITAIN stood as the boundary of the universe, beyond which all was air and water; and long it was ere the trembling coasters were certain whether Britain was an island or a continent, — a secret, probably, to the dispersed natives themselves. It was the triumphant fleet of Agricola, nearly a century after the descent of Cæsar, which, encircling it, proclaimed to the universe that Britain was an island. From that day, Albion has lifted its white head, embraced by the restless ocean; but, often betrayed by that treacherous guardian, she became the possession of successive races.

Nations have derived their names from some accidental circumstance; some peculiarity marking their national character, or descriptive of the site of their country. The names of our island and of our islanders have exercised the inquiries, and too often the ingenuity, of our antiquarian etymologists. There are about half a hundred origins of the name of Britain, some absurd, many fanciful, all uncertain.* Our primitive ancestors distinguished themselves, in pride or simplicity, as *Brith* and *Brithon: Brith* signified "stained," and *Brithon* "a stained man," according to Camden.† The predi-

* See the opening of Speed's "Chronicle."

† The historian of our land, in the solemnity of his high office, unwilling that an obscure Welsh prince named *Prydain* should have left his immemorable name to this glorious realm, as a Welsh triad professes, was delighted to draw the national name out of the native tongue, appositely descriptive of the prevalent custom; but when, seduced by this siren of etymology, our grave Camden, to display the passion of a painted people for colors, collects a long list of ancient British names of polysyllabic

lection for coloring their bodies induced the civilized Romans to designate the people who were driven to the Caledonian forests as *Picts*, or a painted people.

That the native term of *Brith*, or *Brithon*, by its curt harshness, would clash on the modulating ear of the Greek voyager or the Latin poet, seems probable; for by them it was amplified. And thus we owe to sonorous antiquity the name now famous as their own; for BRITANNIA first appeared in their writings, bequeathed to us by the masters of the world as their legacy of glory.

To the knowledge of the Romans, the island exceeded in magnitude all other islands; and they looked on this land with pride and anxiety, while they dignified Britain as the "Roman island." The Romans even personified the insular genius with poetic conceptions. Britannia is represented as a female seated on a rock, armed with a spear; or leaning on a prow, while the ship beside her attests her naval power. We may yet be susceptible of the prophetic flattery, when we observe the Roman has also seated her on a globe, with the symbol of military power, and the ocean rolling under her feet.*

The tale of these ancient Britons, who should have been our ancestors, is told by the philosophical historian of antiquity. Under successive Roman governors, they still remained divided by native factions: "A circumstance," observes Tacitus, "most useful for us, among such a powerful people, where, each combating singly, all are subdued." A century, as we have said, had not elapsed from the landing of Cæsar to the administration of Agricola. That enlightened

elongation, and culls from each a single syllable, which, by its sound, he conceives alludes to blue or red or yellow, our sage, in proving more than was requisite, has encumbered his cause, and has thrown suspicion over the whole. The doom of the etymologist, so often duped by affinity of *sounds*, seems to have been that of our judicious Camden.

* Evelyn's "Numismata." Pinkerton has engraven ten of these Britannias, struck by the Romans, in his "Essay on Medals."

general changed the policy of former governors. He allured the Britons from their forest retreats and reedy roofs, to partake of the pleasures of a Roman city, to dwell in houses, to erect lofty temples, and to indulge in dissolving baths. The barbarian who had scorned the Roman tongue now felt the ambition of Roman eloquence, and the painted Briton of Cæsar was enveloped in the Roman toga. Severus, in another century after Agricola, as an extraordinary evidence of his successful government, appealed to Britain: "Even the Britons are quiet!" exclaimed the emperor. The tutelary genius of Rome through four centuries preserved Britain even from the Britons themselves: but the Roman policy was fatal to the national character; and, when the day arrived that their protector forsook them, the Britons were left among their ancient discords. For provincial jealousies, however concealed by circumstances, are never suppressed: the fire lives in its embers, ready to be kindled.

The island of Britain, itself not extensive, was broken into petty principalities. We are told that there were nearly two hundred kinglings, the greater part of whom did not presume to wear crowns. Sometimes they united in their jealousies of some paramount tyrant; but they raged among themselves: and the passion of Gildas has figured them as "the Lioness of Devonshire" encountering a "Lion's Whelp" in Dorsetshire; and "the Bear-baiter," trembling before his regal brother, "the Great Bull-dog." "These kings were not appointed by God!" exclaims the British Jeremiah, — he who wrote under the name of Gildas. Thus the Britons formed a powerless aggregate, and never a nation. The naked Irish haunted their shores, covering their sea with piracy; and the Picts rushed from their forests, — giants of the North, who, if Gildas does not exaggerate, even dragged down from their walls the amazed Britons. Such a people, in their terrified councils, were to be suppliants to the valor of foreigners: from that hour they were doomed to be chased from their

natal soil. They invited, or they encouraged, another race to become their mercenaries or their allies. The small and the great from other shores hastened to a new dominion. Britain then became "a field of fortune to every adventurer, when nothing less than kingdoms were the prize of every fortunate commander." *

We have now the history of a people whose enemies inhabited their ancient land: the flame and the sword ceaselessly devouring the soil; their dominion shrinking in space, and the people diminishing in number. Victory for them was fatal as defeat. The disasters of the Britons pursued them through the despair of almost two centuries. It would have been the history of a whole people ever retreating, yet hardly in flight, had it been written. Shall we refuse, on the score of their disputed antiquity, the evidence of the Welsh bards? The wild grandeur of the melancholy poetry of those ancient Britons attests the reality of their story and the depth of their emotions.†

We have spun the last thread of our cobweb; and we know not on what points it hangs, such irreconcilable hypotheses are offered to us by our learned antiquaries, whenever they would account for the origin or the disappearance of a whole people. The mystery deepens, and the confusion darkens amid contradictions and incredibilities, when the British historian contemplates in the perspective the Fata Morgana of another Britain on the opposite shores of the ancient Armorica, another Britain in La Brétagne.

The ancient Armorica was a district extending from the Loire to the Seine, about sixty leagues; and except on the land side, which joined Poictou, is encircled by the ocean. Composed of several small states, in the decline of the Roman Empire they shook off the Roman yoke; and their independ-

* Milton.

† See Mr. Turner's able "Vindication of the Genuineness of the Ancient British Bards."

ence was secured by the obscurity of their sequestered locality.

The tale runs, that Maximus, having engaged his provincial Britons in his ambitious schemes, rewarded their military aid by planting them in one of these Armorican communities. To give color to this tradition, the story adds that this Roman general had a considerable interest in Wales; "having married the daughter of a powerful chieftain, whose chapel at Carnarvon is still shown."* The marriage of this future Roman emperor with a Welsh princess would serve as an embellishment to a Welsh genealogy. This event must have occurred about the year 384. When the Britons were driven out of their country by faithless allies, Armorica would offer an easy refuge for fugitives: there they found brothers already settled, or friends willing to receive them.†

In this uncertainty of history, amid the dreams of theoretical antiquaries, we cannot doubt that at some time there was a powerful colony of Britons in Armorica. They acquired dominion as well as territory. They changed that masterless Armorican state, to which they were transplanted, from an

* Warton draws his knowledge from Rowland's "Mona Antiqua." Geoffry of Monmouth would have extended his inquiry. Camden, judicious as he was, has actually bestowed the kingdom, as well as the princess, on this Roman general; and Gibbon has sarcastically noticed, that Camden has been authority for all "his blind followers." The source of this sort of history lies in the volume of the "Monk of Monmouth," where Gibbon might have found the number of the numerous army of Maximus. Rowland's "Mona Antiqua Restaurata" is one of the most extraordinary pieces of our British antiquities. It is written with the imbrowned rust of our old English antiquaries, where nothing on a subject seems to be omitted: but our author, unlike his contemporary antiquaries, is sceptical even on his own acquisitions; he asserts little, and assumes nothing. One may conceive the native simplicity of an author, who, having to describe the Isle of Anglesey, opens his work with the history of Chaos itself, to explain, by the division of land and water, the origin of islands. I have heard that this learned antiquary never travelled from his native island.

† "L'Art de vérifier les Dates," article *Bretagne*, is thrown into utter confusion. It seems, however, to indicate that there were many migrations; but all is indistinct or uncertain.

aristocracy into a monarchy, — that government to which they had been accustomed: they consecrated the strange land by the baptism of their own national name; and to this day it is called Brétagne, or Britain. And surely the Britons carried with them all their home-affections; for they made the new country an image of the old. Not only had they stamped on it the British name, but the Britons of Cornwall called a considerable district by their own provincial name, known in France as "Le Pays de Cornouaille;" and their speech perpetuated their vernacular Celtic. At the siege of Belleisle, in 1756, the honest Britons of the principality among our soldiers were amazed to find that they and the peasants of Brittany were capable of conversing together. This expatriation reminds us of the emotions of the first settlers in the New World. Ancient Spain reflected herself in her New Spain; and our first emigrants called their "plantations" "New England," distributing local names borrowed from the land of their birth, — undying memorials of their parent source.

This singular event in the civil annals of the ancient Britons has given rise to a circumstance unparalleled in the literary history of every people; for it has often involved in a mysterious confusion a part of our literary and historical antiquities. The Britain in France is not always discriminated from our own; and this double Britain at times becomes provokingly mystifying. Two eminent antiquaries, Douce and Ritson, sometimes conceived that Brétagne meant England, — a circumstance which might upset a whole hypothesis.

In the fastnesses of Wales, on the heights of Caledonia, and on the friendly land of Armorica, are yet tracked the fugitive and ruined Britons. It is most generally conceded, that they retreated to the western coasts of England; and that, often discomfited, they took their last refuge in those "mountain heights" of Cambria.

Their shadowy Arthur has left an undying name in romance, and is a nonenity in history. Whether Arthur was a

mortal commander heading some kings of Britain, or whether religion and policy were driven to the desperate effort for rallying their fugitives by a national name, and "a hope deferred," like the Sebastian of Portugal, this far-famed chieftain could never have been a fortunate general. He displayed his invincibility but in some obscure and remote locality. He struck no terror among his enemies, for they have left his name unchronicled; nor, living, have the bards distinguished his pre-eminence. "The grave of Arthur is a mystery of the world," exclaimed Taliessin, the great bard of the Britons. But the mortal who vanished in the cloud of conflict had never seen death; and to the last the Britons awaited for the day of their Redeemer, when Arthur should return in his immortality, accompanied by "the Flood-king of the Deluge," from the Inys Avallon, the Isle of the Mystic Apple-tree, their Eden or their Elysium. Arthur was a myth, half-Christian and half-Druidical. In Armorica, as in Wales, his coming was long expected, till "Espérance brétonne" became proverbial for all chimerical hopes.

Thus the aborigines of this island vanished; but their name is still attached to us. The Anglo-Saxons became our progenitors, and the Saxon our mother-tongue: yet so complex and incongruous is the course of time, that we still call ourselves Britons and "true Britons;" and the land we dwell in, Great Britain. Nor is it less remarkable, that the days of the Christian week commemorate the names of seven Saxon idols.* There are improbabilities and incongruities in authentic history as hard to reconcile as any we meet with in wild romance.

During six centuries, the Saxons and the Normans combined to banish from the public mind the history of the Britons: it was lost; it did not exist even among the Britons in Wales. In the reign of Henry the First, an archdeacon of

* Verstegan has finely engraved these idols in his "Restitution;" so delighted was this Teutonic Christian with these hideous absurdities of his pagan ancestors, and so proud of his Saxon descent.

Oxford, who was that king's justiciary, being curious in ancient histories, opportunely brought out of "Britain in France" "a very ancient book in the British tongue." This book, which still forms the Gordian knot of the antiquary, he confided to the safe custody and fertile genius of Geoffry, the Monk of Monmouth. It contained a regular story of the British kings, opening with Brute, the great-grandson of Priam in this airy generation; kings who, Geoffry "had often wondered, were wholly unnoticed by Gildas and Bede." "Yet," adds our historian, "their deeds were celebrated by many people in a *pleasant manner*, and *by heart, as if they had been written.*" This remarkable sentence aptly describes that species of national songs which the early poets have always provided for the people, — traditions which float before history is written. Whether this very ancient British book, almost five centuries old, was a volume of these poetical legends, which our historian might have arranged into that "regular history" which is furnished by his Latin prose version, we are left without the means of ascertaining; since it proved to be the only copy ever found, and was never seen after the day of the translation. The Monk of Monmouth does not arrogate to himself any other merit than that of a faithful translator; and, with honest simplicity, warns of certain additions, which, even in a history of two thousand years contained in a small volume, were found necessary.

We are told that the Britons who passed over into France carried with them "their archives." But there were other Britons who did not fly to the sixty leagues of Armorica; and of these the only "archives" we hear of are those which the romancers so perpetually assure us may be consulted at Caerleon, or some other magical residence of the visionary Arthur. The Armorican colony must have formed but a portion of the Britons; and it would be unreasonable to suppose, that these fugitives could, by any human means, sequestrate and appropriate for themselves the whole history of the nation, without

leaving a fragment behind. Yet nothing resembling the Armorican originals has been traced among the Welsh. Our Geoffry modestly congratulates his contemporary annalists, while he warns them off the preserve where lies his own well-stocked game. And thus he speaks: "The history of the kings who were the successors in Wales of those here recorded I leave to Karadoc of Lancarven, as I do also the kings of the Saxons to William of Malmesbury, and Henry of Huntingdon; but I advise them to be silent concerning the British kings, since they have not that book written in the British tongue, which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, brought out of Britain." Well might Geoffry exult: he possessed the sole copy ever found in both the Britains.

The British history is left to speak for itself in a great simplicity of narrative, where even the supernatural offers no obstacle to the faith of the historian, — a history which might fascinate a child as well as an antiquary. These remote occurrences are substantiated by the careful dates of a romantic chronology. Events are recorded which happened when David reigned in Judæa, and Sylvius Latinus in Italy, and Gad, Nathan, and Asaph prophesied in Israel; and the incidents of Lear's pathetic story occurred when Isaiah and Hosea flourished, and Rome was built by the two brothers. It tells of one of the British monarchs, how the lady of his love was concealed during seven years in a subterraneous palace. On his death, his avengeful queen cast the mother and her daughter into the river which still bears that daughter's name, — Sabrina, or the Severn; and was not forgotten by Drayton. Another incident adorns a canto of Spenser: the Lear came down to Shakspeare, as the fraternal feuds of Ferrex and Porrex created our first tragedy by Sackville. There are other tales which by their complexion betray their legendary origin.

Whatever assumed the form of history was long deemed authentic; and such was the authority of this romance of Geoffry,

that, when Edward the First claimed the crown of Scotland in his letter to the pope, he founded his right on a passage in Geoffry's book. Doubtless this very passage was held to be as veracious by the Scots themselves, only that on this occasion they decided to fight against the text. Four centuries after Geoffry had written, when Henry the Seventh appointed a commission to draw up his pedigree, they traced the royal descent from the imaginary Brutus; and, reckoning all Geoffry's British kings in the line, — the fairies of history, — made the English monarch a descendant in the hundredth degree. We now often hear of "the fabulous" History of Geoffry of Monmouth; but neither his learned translator in 1718, nor the most eminent Welsh antiquaries, attach any such notion to a history crowded with domestic events, and with names famous, yet unknown.

After the lapse of so many centuries, the scrutinizing investigation of a thoughtful explorer in British antiquities has demonstrated, through a chain of recondite circumstances, that this History of Geoffry of Monmouth, and its immediate predecessor, the celebrated Chronicle of the pseudo-Archbishop Turpin, were sent forth on the same principle on which to this day we publish party pamphlets, — to influence the spirit of two great nations opposed in interest and glory to each other; in a word, that they were two Tales of a Tub, thrown out to busy those mighty whales, France and England.*

One great result of their successful grasp of the popular feelings could never have been contemplated by these grave forgers of fabulous history. The Chronicle of Archbishop Turpin and the British History of Geoffry of Monmouth became the parents of those two rival families of romances which commemorate the deeds of the Paladins of Charlemagne and the Knights of Arthur, the delight of three centuries.

The Welsh of this day possess very ancient manuscripts, which they cherish as the remains of the ancient Britons.

* Turner's "History of England during the Middle Ages," iv. 326.

These preserve the deep strains of poets, composed in triumph or in defeat, — the poetry of a melancholy race. Gray first attuned the Cymry harp to British notes, more poetical than the poems themselves; while others have devoted their pens to translation, unhappily not always master of the language of their version. These manuscripts contain also a remarkable body of fiction in the "MABINOGION," or juvenile amusements, a collection of prose tales combining the marvellous and the imaginative. Some are chivalric and amatory, stamped with the manners and customs of the middle ages; others, apparently of a much higher antiquity, like all such national remains, are considered mythological; some there are not well adapted, perhaps, to the initiation of youth. Obviously, they are nothing more than short romances; but we are solemnly assured that the "Mabinogion" abound with occult mysteries, and that simple fiction only served to allure the British neophyte to bardic mysticism. A learned writer, who is apt to view old things in a new light, and whose boldness invigorates the creeping toil of the antiquary, reveals the esoteric doctrine, — "The childhood alluded to in their title is an early and preparatory stage of initiation: they were calculated to inflame curiosity, to exercise ingenuity, and lead the aspirant gradually into a state of preparation for things which ears not long and carefully disciplined were unfit to hear." *

* "Britannia after the Romans." The literary patriotism of Wales has been more remarkable among humble individuals than among the squirearchy, if we except the ardent Pennant. Mr. Owen Jones, an honest furrier in Thames Street, kindled by the love of fatherland, offered the Welsh public a costly present of the "Archæology of Wales," containing the bardic poetry, genealogies, triads, chronicles, &c., in their originals. The haughty descendant of the Cymry disdained to translate for the Anglo-Saxon. To Mr. William Owen the lore of Cambria stands deeply indebted for his persevering efforts. Under the name of Meirion, he long continued his literal versions of the Welsh bards in the early volumes of the "Monthly Magazine." He has furnished a Cambrian biography and a dictionary.

Some years ago, a learned Welsh scholar, Dr. Owen Pughe, issued proposals to publish the "Mabinogion," accompanied by translations, on the

Every people have tales which do not require to be written to be remembered, whose shortness is the salt which preserves them through generations. Our ancestors long had heard of "Breton lays" and "British tales," from the days of Chaucer to those of Milton; but it was reserved for our own day to ascertain the species, and to possess those forgotten yet imaginative effusions of the ancient Celtic genius. Our literary antiquaries have discovered reposing among the Harleian manuscripts the writings of Marie de France,* an Anglo-Norman poetess, who, in the thirteenth century, versified many old Breton lais, which, she says, "she had heard and well remembered." Who can assure us whether this Anglo-Norman poetess gathered her old tales (for such she calls them) in the French Britain or the English Britain, where she always resided?

It is among the Welsh we find a singular form of artificial memory which can be traced among no other people. These are their TRIADS. Though unauthorized by the learned in Celtic antiquities, I have sometimes fancied that in the form we may possess a relic of Druidical genius. A triad is formed by classing together three things, neither more nor less, but supposed to bear some affinity; though a fourth or fifth might occur with equal claim to be admitted into the category.† To connect three things together apparently analogous, though in

completion of a subscription-list sufficient to indemnify the costs of printing. — See Mr. Crofton Croker's interesting work on "Fairy Legends," vol. iii. He appealed in vain to the public; but the whole loss remains with them. Recently, a munificent lady (Lady Charlotte Guest) has resumed the task, and has presented us, in the most elegant form, with two tales such as ladies read. Since this note was written, several cheering announcements of some important works have been put forth. [Many have since been published.]

* See Warton and Ellis. "Poésies de Marie de France" have been published by M. de Roquefort, Paris, 1820.

† "The translators do the triadist an injustice in rendering *tri* by '*the three*,' when he has put no *the* at all. The number was accounted fortunate, and they took a pleasure in binding up all their ideas into little sheaves or fasciculi of three; but, in so doing, they did not mean to imply that there were no more such." — *Britannia after the Romans.*

reality not so, sufficed for the stores of knowledge of a triadist: but to fix on any three incidents for an historical triad discovered a very narrow range of research; and, if designed as an artificial memory, three insulated facts, deprived of dates or descriptions or connection, neither settled the chronology, nor enlarged the understanding. It is, however, worthy of remark, that, when the triad is of an ethical cast, the number *three* may compose an excellent aphorism; for three things may be predicated with poignant concision, when they relate to our moral qualities or to the intellectual faculties. In this capricious form, the triad has often afforded an enduring principle of human conduct or of critical discrimination; for our feelings are less problematical than historical events, and more permanent than the recollection of three names.*

* As these artificial associations, like the topics invented by the Roman rhetoricians, have been ridiculed by those who have probably formed their notions from unskilful versions, I select a few which might enter into the philosophy of the human mind. They denote a literature far advanced in critical refinement, and appear to have been composed from the sixth to the twelfth century.

"The three foundations of genius: the gift of God, human exertion, and the events of life."

"The three first requisites of genius: an eye to see nature, a heart to feel it, and a resolution that dares follow it."

"The three things indispensable to genius: understanding, meditation, and perseverance."

"The three things that improve genius: proper exertion, frequent exertion, and successful exertion."

"The three qualifications of poetry: endowment of genius, judgment from experience, and felicity of thought."

"The three pillars of judgment: bold design, frequent practice, and frequent mistakes."

"The three pillars of learning: seeing much, suffering much, and studying much." — See Turner's "Vindication of the Ancient British Bards;" Owen's "Dissertation on Bardism, prefixed to the Heroic Elegies of Llywarç Hen."

THE

NAME OF ENGLAND AND OF THE ENGLISH.

Two brothers and adventurers of an obscure Saxon tribe raised their ensign of the White Horse on British land. The visit was opportune, or it was expected: this remains a state secret. Welcomed by the British monarch and his perplexed council amid their intestine dissensions as friendly allies, they were renowned for their short and crooked swords called *Seax*, which had given the generic name of Saxons to their tribe.

These descendants of Woden (for such even the petty chieftains deemed themselves), whose trade was battle, and whose glory was pillage, showed the spiritless what men do who know to conquer the few against the many. They baffled the strong, and they annihilated the weak. The Britons were grateful. The Saxons lodged in the land till they took possession of it. The first Saxon founded the kingdom of Kent; twenty years after, a second in Sussex raised the kingdom of the South Saxons; in another twenty years appeared the kingdom of the West Saxons. It was a century after the earliest arrival that the great emigration took place. The tribe of the Angles depopulated their native province, and flocked to the fertile island under that foeman of the Britons whom the bards describe as "the Flame-bearer" and "the Destroyer." Every quality peculiar to the Saxons was hateful to the Britons; even their fairness of complexion. Taliessin terms Hengist "a white-bellied hackney," and his followers

are described as of "hateful hue and hateful form." The British poet delights to paint "a Saxon shivering and quaking, his *white hair* washed in blood;" and another sings how "close upon the backs of the *pale-faced* ones were the spear-points."*

Already the name itself of *Britain* had disappeared among the invaders. Our island was now called "Saxony beyond the sea," or "West Saxon land;" and, when the expatriated Saxons had alienated themselves from the land of their fathers, those who remained faithful to their native hearths perhaps proudly distinguished themselves as "the old Saxons;" for by this name they were known by the Saxons in Britain.

Eight separate but uncertain kingdoms were raised on the soil of Britain, and present a movable surface of fraternal wars and baffled rivals. There was one kingdom long left kingless; for "no man dared, though never so ambitious, to take up the sceptre which many had found so hot, — the only effectual cure of ambition that I have read:" these are the words of Milton. Finally, to use the quaint phrase of the Chancellor Whitelock, "the octarchy was brought into one." At the end of five centuries, the Saxons fell prostrate before a stronger race.

But, of all the accidents and the fortunes of the Saxon dynasty, not the least surprising is that an obscure town in the duchy of Sleswick, *Anglen*, is commemorated by the transference of its name to one of the great European nations. The *Angles*, or *Engles*, have given their denomination to the land of Britain: *Engle-land* is *England*, and the *Engles* are the *English*.†

* "Britannia after the Romans," 62, 4to.

† It is a singular circumstance, that our neighbors have preserved the name of our country more perfectly than we have done by our mutilated term of *England;* for they write it with antiquarian precision, *Angle-terre*, — the land of the Angles. Our counties bear the vestiges of these Saxons expelling or exterminating the native Britons, as our pious Camden ejaculates, "by God's wonderful providence."

How it happened that the very name of *Britain* was abolished, and why the Anglian was selected in preference to the more eminent race, may offer a philosophical illustration of the accidental nature of LOCAL NAMES.

There is a tale familiar to us from youth, that Egbert, the more powerful king of the West Saxons, was crowned the first monarch of England, and issued a decree that this kingdom of Britain should be called England; yet an event so strange as to have occasioned the change of the name of the whole country remains unauthenticated by any of the original writers of our annals.* No record attests that Egbert in a solemn coronation assumed the title of "King of England." His son and successor never claimed such a legitimate title; and even our illustrious Alfred, subsequently, only styled himself "King of the West Saxons."

The story, however, is of ancient standing: for Matthew of Westminster alludes to a similar if not the same incident; namely, that, by "a common decree of all the Saxon kings, it was ordained that the title of the island should no longer be Britain, from Brute, but henceforward be called from the English, England." Stowe furnishes a positive circumstance in this obscure transaction: "Egbert caused the brazen image of Cadwaline, King of the Britons, to be thrown down." The decree noticed by Matthew of Westminster, combined with the fact of pulling down the statue of a popular British monarch, betrays the real motive of this singular national change. Whether it were the suggestion of Egbert, or the unanimous agreement of the assembled monarchs who were his tributary kings, it was a stroke of deep political wis-

* The diligent investigator of the history of our Anglo-Saxons concludes that this unauthorized tale of the coronation and the decree of Egbert is unworthy of credence.

Camden, in his first edition, had fixed the date of the change of the name as occurring in the year 810: in his second edition, he corrected it to 800. Holinshed says, *about* 800. Speed gives a much later date, — 819. It is evident that these disagreeing dates are all hazarded conjectures.

dom: it knitted the members into one common body, under one name, abolishing by legislative measures the very memory of Britain from the land. Although, therefore, no positive evidence has been produced, the state policy carries an internal evidence which yields some sanction to the obscure tradition.

It is a nicer difficulty to account for the choice of the Anglian name. It might have been preferred to distinguish the Saxons of Britain from the Saxons of the Continent; or the name was adopted, being that of the far more numerous race among these people. Four kingdoms of the octarchy were possessed by the Angles. Thus doubtful and obscure remains the real origin of our national name, which hitherto has hinged on a suspicious fact.

The casual occurrence of the ENGLES leaving their name to this land has bestowed on our country a foreign designation; and, — for the contingency was nearly occurring, — had the kingdom of Northumbria preserved its ascendency in the octarchy, the seat of dominion had been altered. In that case, the Lowlands of Scotland would have formed a portion of England; York would have stood forth as the metropolis of Britain; and London had been but a remote mart for her port and her commerce. Another idiom, perhaps, too, other manners, had changed the whole face of the country. We had been Northmen, not Southerns: our neighborhood had not proved so troublesome to France. But the kingdom of Wessex prevailed, and became the sole monarchy of England. Such local contingencies have decided the character of a whole people.*

The history of LOCAL NAMES is one of the most capricious and fortuitous in the history of man. The etymologist must not be implicitly trusted; for it is necessary to be

* Mitford's "Harmony of Language," 429. I might have placed this possible circumstance in the article, "A History of Events which have not happened," in "Curiosities of Literature."

acquainted with the history of a people, as much as the history of languages, to be certain of local derivations. We have recently been cautioned, by a sojourner in the most ancient of kingdoms,* not too confidently to rely on etymology, or to assign too positively any reason for the origin of LOCAL NAMES. No etymologist could have accounted for the name of our nation, had he not had recourse to our annals. Sir WALTER RALEIGH, from his observations in the New World, has confirmed this observation by circumstances which probably remain unknown to the present inhabitants. The actual names given to those places in America which they still retain are nothing more than the blunders of the first Europeans, demanding by signs and catching at words by which neither party were intelligible to one another.†

* Sir GARDNER WILKINSON, in the curious volume of his recondite discoveries in the land of the Pyramids.

† "History of the World," 167, fol. 1666. We have also a curious account of the ancient manner of naming persons and places among our own nation in venerable Lambarde's "Perambulations of Kent," 349, 453.

THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

THE history and literature of England are involved in the transactions of a people, who, living in such remote times at the highest of their fortunes, never advanced beyond a semi-civilization. But political freedom was the hardy and jealous offspring nursed in the forests of Germany. There was first heard the proclamation of equal laws; and there a people first assumed the name of Franks, or Freemen. Our language and our laws and our customs originate with our Teutonic ancestors: among them we are to look for the trunk, if not the branches, of our national establishments. In the rude antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, our theoretical inquirers in ecclesiastical history trace purer doctrines and a more primitive discipline; and in the shadowy Witenagemot, the movable elements of the British Constitution. The language and literature of England still lie under their influence; for this people everywhere left the impression of a strong hand.

The history of the Anglo-Saxons as a people is without a parallel in the annals of a nation. Their story during five centuries of dominion in this land may be said to have been unknown to generations of Englishmen. The monuments of their history, the veritable records of their customs and manners, their polity, their laws, their institutions, their literature, whatever reveals the genius of a people, lie entombed in their own contemporary manuscripts, and in another source which we long neglected, — in those ancient volumes of their Northern brothers, who had not been idle observers of the transactions of England, which seems often to have been to them

"the land of promise." The Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, those authentic testimonies of the existence of the nation, were long dispersed, neglected, even unintelligible, disfigured by strange characters, and obscured by perplexing forms of diction. The language as well as the writing had passed away; all had fallen into desuetude; and no one suspected that the history of a whole people so utterly cast into forgetfulness could ever be written.

But the lost language and the forgotten characters antiquity and religion seemed to have consecrated in the eyes of the learned Archbishop MATTHEW PARKER, who was the first to attempt their restitution by an innocent stratagem. To his edition of Thomas Walsingham's History in 1574, his Grace added the Life of Alfred by this king's secretary, Asser, *printed in the Saxon character;* we are told, as "an invitation to English readers to draw them in unawares to an acquaintance with the *handwriting of their ancestors.*"* "The invitation" was somewhat awful; and whether the guests were delighted or dismayed, let some Saxonist tell. SPELMAN, the great legal archæologist, was among the earliest who ventured to search amid the Anglo-Saxon duskiness, at a time when he knew not one who could even interpret the writing. This great lawyer had been perplexed by many barbarous names and terms which had become obsolete: they were Saxon. He was driven to the study; and his "Glossary" is too humble a title for that treasure of law and antiquity, of history and of disquisition, which astonished the learned world at home and abroad, while the unsold copies during the life of the author checked the continuation; so few was the number of students, and few they must still be. Yet the devotion of its votary was not the less; for he had prepared the foundation of a Saxon professorship. Spelman was the father: but he who enlarged the inheritance of these

* Bp. Nicholson's Eng. Lib.

Anglo-Saxon studies appeared in the learned SOMNER; and, though he lived through distracted times which loved not antiquity, the cell of the antiquary was hallowed by the restituted lore. HICKES, in his elaborate "Thesaurus," displayed a literature which had never been read, and which he himself had not yet learned to read. These were giants: their successors were dwarfs, who could not add to their stores, and little heeded their possessions. Few rarely succeeded in reading the Saxon; and, at that day (about the year 1700), no printer could cast the types, which were deemed barbarous, or, as the antiquary Rowe Mores expresses it, "unsightly to politer eyes." A lady, — and she is not the only one who has found pleasure in studying this ancient language of our country, — Mrs. ELSTOB, the niece of Hickes, patronized by a celebrated Duchess of Portland, furnished several versions; but the Saxon Homilies she had begun to print, for some unknown cause, were suspended: the unpublished but printed sheets are preserved at our National Library. These pursuits, having long languished, seemed wholly to disappear from our literature.

None of our historians, from MILTON to HUME, ever referred to an original Saxon authority. They took their representations from the writings of the monks; but the true history of the Anglo-Saxons was not written in Latin. It was not from monkish scribes, who recorded public events in which the Saxons had no influence, that the domestic history of a race dispossessed of all power could be drawn; and far less would they record the polity which had once constituted their lost independence. The annalist of the monastery, flourishing under another dynasty, placed in other times and amid other manners, was estranged from any community of feeling with a people who were then sunk into the helots of England. MILTON, in his "History of Britain," imagined that the transactions of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy, or Octarchy, would be as worthless "to chronicle as the wars of kites or crows

flocking and fighting in the air." Thus a poet-historian can veil, by a brilliant metaphor, the want of that knowledge which he contemns before he has acquired. This was less pardonable in a philosopher; and when HUME observed, perhaps with the eyes of Milton, that "he would hasten through the obscure and uninteresting period of Saxon annals," however cheering to his reader was the calmness of his indolence, the philosopher, in truth, was wholly unconscious that these "obscure and uninteresting annals of the Anglo-Saxons" formed of themselves a complete history, offering new results for his profound and luminous speculations on the political state of man. Genius is often obsequious to its predecessors, and we track BURKE in the path of Hume; and, so late as in 1794, we find our elegant antiquary, Bishop PERCY, lamenting the scanty and defective annals of the Anglo-Saxons, — naked epitomes, bare of the slightest indications of the people themselves. The history of the dwellers in our land had hitherto yielded no traces of the customs and domestic economy of the nation: all, beyond some public events, was left in darkness and conjecture.

We find ELLIS and RITSON still erring in the trackless paths. All this national antiquity was wholly unsuspected by these zealous investigators. In this uncertain condition stood the history of the Anglo-Saxons, when a new light rose in the hemisphere, and revealed to the English public a whole antiquity of so many centuries. In 1805, for the first time, the story and the literature of the Anglo-Saxons was given to the country. It was our studious explorer, SHARON TURNER, who first opened these untried ways in our national antiquities.*

Anglo-Saxon studies have been recently renovated; but unexpected difficulties have started up. A language whose

* It is pleasing to record a noble instance of the enthusiasm of learned research. "The leisure hours of sixteen years" furnished a comprehensive history of which "two-thirds had not yet appeared." — *Mr. Turner's Preface.*

syntax has not been regulated, whose dialects can never be discriminated, and whose orthography and orthoepy seem irrecoverable, yields faithless texts when confronted; and treacherous must be the version if the construction be too literal or too loose, or, what happens sometimes, ambiguous. Different Anglicizers offer more than one construction.*

It is now ascertained that the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts are found in a most corrupt state.† This fatality was occasioned by the inattention or the unskilfulness of the calligrapher, whose task must have required a learned pen. The Anglo-Saxon verse was regulated by a puerile system of alliteration,‡ and the rhythm depended on accentuation. Whenever the strokes, or dots, marking the accent or the pauses, are omitted or misplaced, whole sentences are thrown into confusion, compound words are disjoined, and separate words are jumbled together. "Nouns have been mistaken for verbs, and particles for nouns."

These difficulties, arising from unskilful copyists, are infinitely increased by the genius of the Anglo-Saxon poets themselves. The tortuous inversion of their composition often leaves an ambiguous sense. Their perpetual periph-

* A sufferer, moreover, fully assures us that some remain, which "must baffle all conjecture;" and another critic has judicially decreed, that, in every translation from the Anglo-Saxon that has fallen under his notice, "there are blunders enough to satisfy the most unfriendly critic." "The Song of the Traveller," in "the Exeter Book," was translated by CONYBEARE; a more accurate transcript was given by Mr. KEMBLE in his edition of Beowulf; and now Mr. GUEST has furnished a third, varying from both. We cannot be certain that a fourth may not correct the three.

† "Without exception!" is the energetic cry of the translator of Beowulf.

‡ The first line contains two words commencing with the same letter, and the second line has its first word also beginning with that letter. This difficulty seems insurmountable to a modern reader: for our authority confesses, that "in the Saxon poetry, as it is preserved in manuscripts, the first line often contains but one alliterating word; and, from the negligence of the scribes, the alliteration is, in many instances, entirely lost." — *Dissertation on Anglo-Saxon Poetry, Frazer's Magazine*, xii. 81.

rasis, their abrupt transitions, their pompous inflations and their elliptical style, and not less their portentous metaphorical nomenclature, where a single object must be recognized by twenty denominations, not always appropriate, and too often clouded by the most remote and dark analogies,* — all these have perplexed the most skilful judges, who have not only misinterpreted passages, but have even failed to comprehend the very subject of their original. This last circumstance has been remarkably shown in the fate of the heroic tale of BEOWULF. When it first fell to the hard lot of WANLEY, the librarian of the Earl of Oxford, to describe

* A striking instance how long a universal error can last, arising from one of these obscure conceits, is noticed by Mr. GRENVILLE PIGOTT in his "Manual of Scandinavian Mythology."

These warlike barbarians were long reproached, that even their religion fomented an implacable hatred of their enemies; for, in the future state of their paradisiacal Valhalla, their deceased heroes rejoiced at their celestial compotations, — *to drink out of the skulls of their enemies.*

A passage in the death-song of Regner Lodbrog, literally translated, is, "Soon shall we *drink* out of the *curved trees of the head;*" which Bishop Percy translates, "Soon, in the splendid hall of Odin, we shall drink beer out of the skulls of our enemies." And thus also have the Danes themselves, the Germans, and the French.

The original and extraordinary blunder lies with Olaus Wormius, the great Danish antiquary, to whose authority poets and historians bowed without looking further. Our grave Olaus was bewildered by this monstrous style of the scalds, and translated this drinking-bout at Valhalla according to his own fancy, — "Ex concavis crateribus cranioruin;" thus turning the "trees of the head" into a "skull," and the skull into a hollow cup. The scald, however, was innocent of this barbarous invention, and, in his violent figures and disordered fancy, merely alluded to the branching horns, growing as trees, from the heads of animals; that is, the curved horns which formed their drinking-cups. If Olaus here, like Homer, nodded, something might be urged for his defence; for who is bound to understand such remote if not absurd conceits? But I do not know that we could plead as fairly for his own interpolating fancy of "drinking out of the skulls of their enemies."

This grave blunder became universal, and a century passed away without its being detected. It was so familiar, that Peter Pindar once said that the booksellers, like the heroes of Valhalla, drank their wine out of the skulls of authors.

"the Exploits of Beowulf," he imagined or conjectured that it contained "the wars which this Dane waged against the reguli or petty kings of Sweden." He probably decided on the subject by confining his view to the opening page, where a hero descends from his ship, but for a very different purpose from a military expedition. Fortunately, Wanley lauded the manuscript as a *tractatus nobilissimus* and an *egregium exemplum* of the Anglo-Saxon poetry. Probably this manuscript remained unopened during a century, when SHARON TURNER detected the error of Wanley; but he himself misconceived the design of these romantic "Exploits." Yet this diligent historian carefully read and analyzed this heroic tale. CONYBEARE, who had fallen into the same erroneous conception, at length caught up a clew in this labyrinth; and finally even a safer issue has been found, though possibly not without some desperate efforts, by the version of Mr. KEMBLE.

Even the learned in Saxon have not always been able to distinguish this verse from prose; the verse unmarked by rhyme being written continuously as prose.* A diction turgid and obscure was apparent; but in what consisted the art of the poet, or the metrical system, long baffled the most ingenious conjectures. RITSON, in his perplexity, described this poetry or metre as a "rhymeless sort of poetry, a kind of bombast or insane prose, from which it is very difficult to be distinguished." TYRWHIT and ELLIS remained wholly at a loss to comprehend the fabric of Anglo-Saxon poesy. HICKES, in the fascination of scholarship, had decided that it proceeded on a metrical system of syllabic quantities, and surmounted all difficulties by submitting the rhythmical cadences of Gothic poesy to the prosody of classical antiquity. This was a literary hallucination, and a remarkable evidence

* HICKES and WANLEY mistook the "Ormulum," a paraphrase of gospel history, as mere prose; when, in fact, it is composed in long lines of fifteen syllables, without rhyme.

of a favorite position maintained merely by the force of prepossession.

To what cause are we to ascribe the complex construction of the diction, and the multiplied intricacies of the metres, of the poetry of the Northmen? Bishop Percy noticed, that the historian of the Runic poetry has counted up among the ancient Icelandic poets one hundred and thirty-six different metres. The Icelandic and the Anglo-Saxon are cognate languages, being both dialects of the ancient Gothic or Teutonic. The genius of the Danish scalds often displays in their Eddas* a sublime creative power far out of the reach of the creeping and narrow faculty of the Saxon: yet the same mechanism regulated both; the fixed recurrence of certain letters or syllables which constitutes that perpetual alliteration, which oftener than rhyme gratified the ear of barbaric poesy, and a metaphorical phraseology or poetical vocabulary appropriated by the bards, furnishing the adept with phrases when he had not always ready any novel conceptions. Shall we deem such arbitrary forms and such artificial contrivances, the mere childishness of tastes, to have been invented in the wintry years of these climates, to amuse themselves in their stern solitudes? or, rather, may we not consider them as a mystery of the craft, the initiation of the order? — for, by this scholarlike discipline in multiplying difficulties, the later bards separated themselves from those humbler minstrels who were left to their own inartificial emotions.

Such prescribed formulæ, and such a mechanism of verse, must have tethered the imagination in a perpetual circle: it was art which violated the free course of nature. In this

* See "A Manual of Scandinavian Mythology," by Mr. Grenville Pigott. 1839. "The Northern Mythology" will be found here not only skilfully arranged, but its wondrous myths and fables elucidated by modern antiquaries. It is further illustrated by the translation of the poem of Ehlenschläger, on "the Gods of the North;" whose genius has been transfused in the nervous simplicity of the present version.

condition we often find even the poetry of the Scandinavians. The famous death-song of Regner Lodbrog seems little more than an iteration of the same ideas. An Anglo-Saxon poem has the appearance of a collection of short hints rather than poetical conceptions, curt and ejaculative: a paucity of objects yields but a paucity of emotions, too vague for detail, too abrupt for deep passion, too poor in fancy to scatter the imagery of poesy. The Anglo-Saxon betrays its confined and monotonous genius: we are in the first age of art, when pictures are but monochromes of a single color. Hence, in the whole map of Anglo-Saxon poetry, it is difficult to discriminate one writer from another.*

Their prose has taken a more natural character than their verse. The writings of Alfred are a model of the Anglo-Saxon style in its purest state. They have never been collected; but it is said they would form three octavo volumes. They consist chiefly of translations.

The recent versions in literal prose, by two erudite Saxonists of two of the most remarkable Anglo-Saxon poems, will enable an English reader to form a tolerable notion of the

* Such is the critical decision of CONYBEARE, a glorious enthusiast. — *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, by* JOHN JOSIAH CONYBEARE. 1826.

The late Mr. Price, the editor of Warton's History, announced an elaborate work on the Anglo-Saxon poetry. The verse of CONYBEARE and the disquisitions of PRICE would have completed this cycle of our ancient poetry. But a fatal coincidence marked the destiny of these eminent votaries of our poetic antiquity; both prematurely ceasing to exist while occupied on their works. CONYBEARE has survived in his brother, whose congenial tastes collected his remains. PRICE, who had long resided abroad, and there had silently stored up the whole wealth of Northern literature, on his return home remained little known till his valued edition of Warton announced to the literary world the acquisitions they were about to receive. He has left a name behind him, but not a work; for Price had no fraternal friend.

Since this chapter was written, Mr. Thomas Wright has published "An Essay on the State of Literature and Learning under the Anglo-Saxons." It displays a comprehensive view taken by one to whose zealous labors the lovers of our ancient literature are so deeply indebted.

genius of this literature. CONYBEARE'S poetical versions remained unrivalled. But if a literal version of a primitive poetry soon ceases to be poetry, so likewise, if the rude outlines are to be retouched and a brilliant coloring is to be borrowed, we are receiving Anglo-Saxon poetry in the cadences of Milton and "the orient hues" of Gray.

CÆDMON AND MILTON.

CÆDMON the Saxonists hail as "the Father of English Song."

The personal history of this bard is given in the taste of the age. Cædmon was a herdsman, who had never read a single poem. Sitting in his "beership," whenever the circling harp, that "Wood of Joy," as the Saxon glee-men have called it, was offered to his hand, all unskilled, the peasant, stung with shame, would hurry homewards. Already past the middle of life, never had the peasant dreamt that he was a sublime poet, or at least a poet composing on sublime themes, incapable as he was even of reading his own Saxon.

As once he lay slumbering in a stall, the apparition of a strange man thus familiarly greeted him: "Cædmon, sing some song to me!" The cowherd modestly urged that he was mute and unmusical. "Nevertheless, thou shalt sing!" retorted the benignant apparition. "What shall I sing?" rejoined the minstrel, who had never sung. "Sing the origin of things!" The peasant, amazed, found his tongue loosened, and listened to his own voice, — a voice which was to reach posterity.

He flew in the morning to the town-reeve to announce a wonder, — that he had become a poet in the course of a single night. He recited the poem; which, however (for we possess it), only proves, that, between sleeping and waking, eighteen lines of dreamy periphrasis may express a single idea. Venerable Bede held this effusion as a pure inspiration: the

modern historian of the Anglo-Saxons indulgently discovers three ideas: Conybeare, more critical, acknowledges that "the eighteen lines expand the mere proposition of 'Let us praise God, the maker of heaven and earth.'" But this was only the first attempt of a great enterprise: it was a thing to be magnified for the neighboring monastery of Whitby, who gladly received such a new brother.

For a poet who had never written a verse, it was only necessary to open his vein: a poet who could not read, only required to be read to. The whole monkery came down with the canonical books. They informed him of all things, from "Genesis" down to "the doctrine of the apostles." "The good man listened," as saith Venerable Bede, "like a clean animal ruminating; and his song and his verse were so winsome to hear, that his teachers wrote them down, and learned from his mouth." These teachers could not have learned more than they themselves had taught. We can only draw out of a cistern the waters which we have poured into it. Every succeeding day, however, swelled the Cædmonian poem. Assuredly they wanted neither zeal nor hands for the glory of the monastery of Whitby.

Such is a literary anecdote of the seventh century conveyed to us by ancient Bede. The dream of the apparition's inspiration of this unlettered monk was one more miracle among many in honor of the monastery: and it was to be told in the customary way; for never yet in a holy brotherhood was found a recusant.

Even to this day, we ourselves dream grotesque adventures: but, in the days of monachism, visions were not merely a mere vivid and lengthened dream, a slight delirium; for they usually announced something important. A dream was a prognostic or a prelude. The garrulous chroniclers, and saintly Bede himself, that primeval gossiper, afford abundant evidence of such secret revelations. Whenever some great act was designed, or some awful secret was to be divulged, a dream

announced it to the world. Was a king to be converted to Christianity, the people were enlightened by the vision which the sovereign revealed to them. Was a maiden to take the vow of virginity, or a monastery to be built, an angelical vision hovered, and sometimes specified the very spot. Was a crime of blood to be divulged by some penitent accessory, somebody had a dream; and the criminal has stood convicted by the grave-side, which gave up the fatal witness in his victim. In those ages of simplicity and pious frauds, a dream was an admirable expedient by which important events were carried on, and mystification satisfactorily explained the incomprehensible.

The marvellous incident on which the history of Cædmon revolves may only veil a fact which has nothing extraordinary in itself, when freed from the invention which disguises it. Legends like the present one were often borrowed by one monastery from another; and an exact counterpart of the dream and history of our Saxon bard, in a similar personage and a like result, has been pointed out as occurring in Gaul. A vernacular or popular version of the Scriptures being required, it was supplied by a *peasant wholly ignorant of the poetic art till he had been instructed in a* DREAM.*

* Sir Francis Palgrave's "Dissertation on Cædmon," in the Archæologia.

In another work, this erudite antiquary explains the marvellous part of Cædmon's history by "natural causes;" and such a principle of investigation is truly philosophical: but we must not look over imposture in the search for "natural causes." "Cædmon's inability to perform his task," observes our learned expositor, "appears to have arisen rather from the want of musical knowledge than from his dulness; and therefore it is quite possible, that, *allowing for some little exaggeration*, his poetical talents may have been *suddenly developed in the manner described.*" — *Hist. of England*, i. 162. Thus the Saxon Milton rose in one memorable night, after a whole life passed without the poet once surmising himself to be poetical; and thus (for we consent not to yield up a single point in the narrative of "the Dream") appeared the patronizing apparition and the exhilarating dialogue. A lingering lover of the mediæval genius can perceive nothing more in a *circumstantial legend* than "a little exaggeration." I seem to hear the shrill

Scriptural themes were common with the poets of the monastery.* The present enterprise, judging from the variety of its fragments from both Testaments and from the Apocrypha, in its complete state would have formed a chronological poem of the main incidents of the Scriptures in the vernacular Saxon. This was a burden of magnitude which no single shoulder could have steadily carried, and probably was supported by several besides "the Dreamer." Critical Saxonists, indeed, have detected a variation in the style, and great inequalities in the work. Such discordances indicate that the paraphrase was occasionally resumed by some successor; as idling monks, at a later period, were often the continuators of voluminous romances. I would class the Cædmonian poem among the many attempts of the monachal genius to familiarize the people with the miraculous and the religious narratives in the Scriptures by a paraphrase in the vernacular idiom. The poem may be deemed as equivocal as the poet. The text has been impeached: interpolations and omissions are acknowledged by the learned in Saxon lore. The poem is said to have been written in the seventh century; and the earliest

attenuated tones of Ritson, in his usual idiomatic diction, screaming, "It is a *lie* and an *imposture* of the stinking *monks!*"

The Viscount de Chateaubriand is infinitely more amusing than the plodders in the "weary ways of antiquity." The mystical tale of the Saxon monk is dashed into a glittering foam of enigmatical brevity. "*Cædmon rêvait en vers et composait des poèmes en dormant; Poésie est Songe.*" And thus dreams may be expounded by dreams! — *Essai sur la Littérature Anglaise*, i. 55.

* "The Six Days of the Creation" offered a subject for an heroic poem to Dracontius, a Spanish monk, in the fifth century, and who was censured for neglecting to honor the seventh by a description of the sabbath of the divine repose. It is preserved in "Bib. Patrum," vol. viii., and has been published with notes. Genesis and Exodus, the Fall of Adam, the Deluge, and the passage of the Red Sea, were themes which invited the sacred effusions of Avitus, the Archbishop of Vienne, who flourished in the sixth century. His writings were collected by Père Sirmond. This archbishop attacked the Arians; but we have only fragments of these polemical pamphlets: as these were highly orthodox, what is wanting occasioned regrets in a former day. Other histories in Latin verse, drawn from the Old Testament, are recorded.

manuscript we possess is of the tenth, suffering in that course of time all the corruptions or variations of the scribes, while the ruder Northern dialect has been changed into the more polished Southern. If we may confide in a learned conjecture, it may happen that Cædmon is no name at all, but merely a word or a phrase; and thus the entity of the Dreamer of the Monastery of Whitby may vanish in the wind of two Chaldaic syllables!* Be this as it may, for us the poem is an entity, whatever becomes of the pretended Dreamer.

It has become an arduous inquiry, whether MILTON has not drawn largely from the obscurity of this monkish Ennius. "In reading Cædmon," says SHARON TURNER, "we are reminded of Milton, — of a 'Paradise Lost' in rude miniature." Conybeare advances, "The pride, rebellion, and punishments of Satan and his princes have a resemblance to Milton so remarkable, that *much of this portion might be almost literally translated by a cento of lines from the great poet.*"† A recent Saxonist, in noticing "the creation of Cædmon as beautiful," adds, "It is still more interesting from *its singular correspondence, even in expression, with 'Paradise Lost.'*"

The ancient as well as the modern of these scriptural poets has adopted a narrative which is not found in the Scriptures. The rebellion of Satan before the creation of man, and

* Among our ancestors, all proper names were significant; and, when they are not, we have the strongest presumptive reasons for suspecting that the name has been borrowed from some other tongue. The piety of many monks, in their pilgrimages in the Holy Land, would induce them to acquire some knowledge of the Hebrew, or even the Chaldee. Bede read Hebrew. A scholar, who has justly observed this, somewhat cabalistically has discovered that "the initial word of Genesis in Chaldee," and printed in Hebraic characters בהדמירך, exhibits the presumed name of the Saxon monk.

† This sort of cento seems to have been a favorite fancy with this masterly versifier; for, of another Anglo-Saxon bard who composed on warlike subjects, this critic says, "If the names of Patroclus and Menelaus were substituted for Byrthnoth and Godric, some of the scenes might be almost literally translated into a cento of lines from Homer." Homer's claim to originality, however, is secure from any critical collation with the old Saxon monk.

his precipitation with the apostate angels into a dungeon-gulf of flame and ice and darkness, though an incident familiar to us as a gospel-text, remains nothing more than a legend, unhallowed by sacred writ.

Where are we, then, to seek for the origin of a notion universal throughout Christendom? I long imagined that this revolt in heaven had been one of the traditions hammered in the old rabbinical forge; and, in the Talmudical lore, there are tales of the fallen angels: but I am assured by a learned professor in these studies, that the Talmud contains no narrative of "the rebellion of Satan." The Hebrews, in their sojourn in Babylon, had imbibed many Chaldean fables, and some fanciful inventions. At this obscure period, did this singular episode in sacred history steal into their popular creed? Did it issue from that awful cradle of monstrous imaginings, of demons, of spirits, and of terrifying deities, — Persia and India? In the Brahminical shasters, we find a rebellion of the angels before the creation, and their precipitation from light into darkness: their restoration by the clemency of the Creator, however, occurs after their probationary state, during millions of years in their metamorphoses on earth; but this seems only the veil of an allegory designed to explain their dark doctrine of the metempsychosis. The rebellion of the angels, as we have been taught it, is associated with their everlasting chains and eternal fire. How the legend became universally received, may baffle inquiry.*

* Notwithstanding the information with which I was favored, I cannot divest myself of the notion, that "the rebellion of the angels" must be more explicitly described among the Jewish traditions than yet appears, because we find allusions to it in two of the apostolical writings. In the Epistle of Jude, ver. 6: "*The angels which kept not their first estate*, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And in Pet. ii. 4: "*God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell*, and delivered them unto chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." These texts have admitted of some dispute; but it seems, however, probable that the apostles, just released from their Jewish bondage, had not emancipated themselves from the received Hebraical doctrines.

But the coincidence of the Cædmonian with the Miltonian poem, in having adopted the same peculiar subject of the revolt of Satan and the expulsion of the angels, is not the most remarkable one in the two works. The same awful narrative is pursued, and we are startled at the opening of the Pandemonium by discovering the same scene and the same actors. When we scrutinize into minuter parts, we are occasionally struck by some extraordinary similarities.

Cædmon, to convey a notion of the ejection from heaven to hell, tells that "the Fiend, with all his comrades, fell from heaven above through as long as *three nights and days*." Milton awfully describes Satan, "confounded, though immortal," rolling in the fiery gulf:—

> "*Nine times the space that measures day and night*
> To mortal men."

Cædmon describes the Deity having cast the evil angel into that "house of perdition, down on that new bed; after, gave him a *name* that the highest (of the devils which they had now become) should be called *Satan* thenceforwards." Milton has preserved the same notice of the origin of *the name*, thus:—

> "To whom the *Arch-Enemy*,
> And thence in heaven called *Satan*;"—

Satan in Hebrew signifying "the Enemy," or "the Adversary."

The harangue of Satan to his legions, by the Saxon monk, cannot fail to remind us of the first grand scene in the "Paradise Lost," however these creations of the two poets be distinct. "The swart hell—a land void of light, and full of flame"—is like Milton's:—

> "Yet from these flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible."

The locality is not unlike: "There they have at even, immeasurably long, each of all the fiends, a renewal of fire, with

sulphur charged; but cometh ere dawn the eastern wind frost, bitter cold, ever fire or dart." This torment we find in the hell of Milton:—

"The bitter change
Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,
From beds of raging *fire* to starve in *ice*."

"The parching air
Burns frore, and *cold performs the effect of fire*." *

The "Inferno" of Dante has also "its eternal darkness for the dwellers in fierce *heat* and in *ice*." † It is evident that the Saxon, the Italian, and the Briton had drawn from the same source. The Satan of Cædmon, in "the torture-house," is represented as in "the dungeon of perdition." He lies in chains, his feet bound, his hands manacled, his neck fastened by iron bonds. Satan and his crew the monk has degraded into Saxon convicts. Milton, indeed, has his—

"Adamantine chains and penal fire;"—

and—

"A dungeon horrible on all sides round."

But, as Satan was to be the great actor, Milton was soon compelled to find some excuse for freeing the Evil Spirit from the chains which heaven had forged; and this he does:—

"Chained on the burning lake, *nor ever thence*
Had risen, or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others."

The Saxon monk had not the dexterity to elude the difficult position in which the Arch-Fiend was for ever fixed: he was indissolubly chained, and yet much was required to be done. It is not, therefore, Satan himself who goes on the

* Paradise Lost, ii. 594. † Inferno, canto iii. 5.

subdolous design of wreaking his revenge on the innocent pair in paradise. For this he despatches one of his associates, who is thus described: "Prompt in arms, he had a crafty soul; this chief set his helmet on his head; he many speeches knew of guileful words: wheeled up from thence, he *departed through the doors of hell.*" We are reminded of—

> "The infernal doors, that on their hinges grate
> Harsh thunder."

The emissary of Satan, in Cædmon, had "a strong mind, lion-like in air; *in hostile mood he dashed the fire aside with a fiend's power.*" * That demon flings aside the flames of hell with the bravery of his sovereign, as we see in Milton:—

> "Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
> His mighty stature: *on each hand, the flames,*
> *Driven backward, slope their pointing spires, and, rolled*
> *In billows,* leave in the midst a horrid vale." †

Cædmon thus represents Satan: "Then spoke the haughty king, who of angels erst was *brightest, fairest in heaven,* beloved of his master: *so beauteous was his form,* he was like to the light stars."

Milton's conception of the form of Satan is the same:—

> "His form had not yet lost
> All her *original brightness,* nor appeared
> Less than archangel ruined." ‡

And—

> "His countenance as the *morning-star,* that guides
> The starry flock, allured them." §

Literary curiosity may be justly excited to account for these apparent resemblances, and to learn whether similarity and coincidence necessarily prove identity and imitation; and whether, finally, Cædmon was ever known to Milton.

The Cædmonian manuscript is as peculiar in its history as

* Cædmon, p. 29. † Paradise Lost, i. 221.
‡ Paradise Lost, i. 592. § Paradise Lost, v. 798.

its subject. This poem, which we are told fixed the attention of our ancestors "from the sixth to the twelfth century," and the genius of whose writer was "stamped deeply and lastingly upon the literature of our country," * had wholly disappeared from any visible existence. It was accidently discovered only in a single manuscript, — the gift of Archbishop Usher to the learned FRANCIS JUNIUS. During thirty years of this eminent scholar's residence in England, including his occasional visits to Holland and Friesland to recover by the study of the Friesic living dialect the extinct Anglo-Saxon, he devoted his protracted life to the investigation of the origin of the Gothic dialects. A Saxon poem, considerable for its size and for its theme, in a genuine manuscript, was for our Northern student a most precious acquisition; and, that this solitary manuscript should not be liable to accidents, Junius printed the original at Amsterdam in 1655, unaccompanied by any translation or by any notes.

We must now have recourse to a few dates.

Milton had fallen blind in 1654. The poet began "Paradise Lost" about 1658. The composition occupied three years; but the publication was delayed till 1667.

If Milton had any knowledge of Cædmon, it could only have been in the solitary and treasured manuscript of Junius. To have granted even the loan of the only original the world possessed, we may surmise that Junius would not have slept through all the nights of its absence; and, if the Saxon manuscript was ever in the hands of Milton, could our poet have read it?

We have every reason to believe that Milton did not read Saxon. At that day, who did? There were not "ten men to save the city." In Milton's "History of England," a loose and solitary reference to the Saxon Chronicle, then untranslated, was probably found ready at hand; for all his Saxon

* Guest's "History of English Rhythms," ii. 23.

annals are drawn from the Latin monkish authorities: and, in that wonderful list of one hundred dramatic subjects which the poet had set down for the future themes of his Muse, there are many on Saxon stories; but all the references are to Speed and Holinshed. The nephew of the poet has enumerated all the languages in which Milton was conversant: "the Hebrew, (and, I think, the Syriac), the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, the Spanish, and French." We find no allusion to any of the Northern tongues, which that votary of classical antiquity and of Ausonian melody and fancy would deem (can we doubt it?) dissonant and barbarous. The Northern scalds were yet as little known as our own Saxons. A recent discovery, that Milton once was desirous of reading Dutch, may possibly be alleged by the Saxonists as an approach to the study of the Saxon; but, at that time, Milton was in office as "the Secretary for Foreign Tongues," and in a busy intercourse with the Hollanders.*

"Secretary Milton," at that moment, was probably anxious to con the phrases of a Dutch state-paper, to scrutinize into the temper of their style. Had Milton ever acquired the

* This curious literary information has been disclosed by ROGER WILLIAMS, the founder of the State of Rhode Island, who was despatched to England in 1651 to obtain the repeal of a charter granted to Mr. Coddington. I give this remarkable passage in the words of this Anglo-American: "It pleased the Lord to call me for some time and with some persons to practise the Hebrew, the Greek, Latin, French, and Dutch. *The Secretary of the Council, Mr. Milton, for my Dutch I read him, read me many more languages.* Grammar-rules begin to be esteemed a tyranny. I taught two young gentlemen, a parliament-man's sons, as we teach our children English, — by words, phrases, and constant talk, &c." This vague "&c." stands so in the original, and leaves his "wondrous tale half-told." — *Memoirs of Roger Williams, the Founder of the State of Rhode Island, by James D. Knowles, Professor of Pastoral Duties in the Newton Theological Institution.* 1834, p. 264.

I am indebted for this curious notice to the prompt kindness of my most excellent friend ROBERT SOUTHEY, — a name long dear to the public, as it will be to posterity; an author, the accuracy of whose knowledge does not yield to its extent.

Dutch idiom for literary purposes, to study Vondel, the Batavian Shakspeare,* from whom some foreigners imagine our poet might have drawn his "Lucifer," it could not have escaped the nephew in the enumeration of his uncle's philological acquirements. But even to read Dutch was not to read a Saxon manuscript, whose strange characters, uncouth abbreviations, and difficult constructions, are only mastered by long practice. To have known any thing about the solitary Cædmon, the poet must have been wholly indebted to the friendly offices of its guardian, — a personal intimacy which does not appear. The improbability that this scholar translated the manuscript phrase by phrase is nearly as great as the supposition, that the poet could have retained ideas and expressions to be reproduced in that epic poem which was not commenced till several years after.

The personal habits of Junius were somewhat peculiar. To his last days, he was unrelentingly busied in pursuits of philology, of which he has left to the Bodleian such monuments of his gigantic industry. Junius was such a rigid

* Mr. SOUTHEY observes, in a letter now before me, that "VONDEL'S 'Lucifer' was published in 1654; his 'Samson,' the same subject as the 'Agonistes,' 1661; his 'Adam,' 1664. CÆDMON, ANDREINI, and VONDEL, each or all, may have led Milton to consider the subject of his 'Paradise Lost;' but Vondel is the one who is most likely to have impressed him. Neither the Dutch nor the language were regarded with disrespect in those days. Vondel was the greatest writer of that language, and the 'Lucifer' is esteemed the best of his tragedies. Milton alone excepted, he was probably the greatest poet then living."

This critical note furnishes curious dates. Milton was blind when the 'Lucifer' was published; and there is so much of the personal feelings and condition of the poet himself in his "Samson Agonistes," that it is probable little or no resemblance could be traced in the Hollander. The "Adam" of Milton, and the whole "Paradise" itself, was completed in 1661. As for Cædmon, I submit the present chapter to Mr. Southey's decision.

No great genius appears to have made such free and wise use of his reading as Milton has done, and which has led, in several instances, to an accusation of what some might term plagiarism. We are not certain that Milton, when not yet blind, may not have read some of those obscure modern Latin poets whom Lauder scented out.

economist of time, that every hour was allotted to its separate work: each day was the repetition of the former; and, on a system, he avoided all visitors. Such a man could not have submitted to the reckless loss of many a golden day in hammering at the obscure sense of the Saxon monk, which the critics find by his own printed text he could not always master; nor is it more likely that Milton himself could have sustained his poetic excitement through the tedious progress of a verbal or cursory paraphrase of Scripture history by this Gothic bard. At that day, even Junius could not have discovered those "elastic rhythms" which solicit the ear of a more modern Saxon scholar in his studies of Cædmon,* but which we entirely owe to the skill and punctuation and accentuation of the recent editor, Mr. Thorpe.

Be it also observed, that Milton published his "Paradise Lost" in the lifetime of Junius, the only judge who could have convicted the bard who had daringly proposed —

> "To pursue
> Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," —

of concealing what he had silently appropriated.

There are so many probabilities against the single possibility of Milton having had any knowledge of Cædmon, that we must decide by the numerical force of our own suggestions.

The startling similarities which have led away critical judgments, if calmly scrutinized, may be found to be those apparent resemblances or coincidences which poets drawing from the same source would fall into. There is a French mystery of "the Conception," where the scene is hell: Lucifer appeals to its inmates in a long address. This Satan of "the Conception" strikingly reminds us of the Prince of Darkness of Milton, and indeed has many creative touches;

* Guest's "History of English Rhythms."

and, had it been written after the work of Milton, it might have seemed a parody.*

Similarity and coincidence do not necessarily prove identity and imitation. Nor is the singular theme of "the Rebellion of the Angels" peculiar to either poet, since those who never heard of the Saxon monk have constructed whole poems and dramas on the celestial revolt.†

We may be little interested to learn, among all the dubious inquiries of "the origin of 'Paradise Lost,'" whether a vast poem, the most elaborate in its parts, and the most perfect in its completion, — a work, in the words of the great artist, —

> "Who knows how long
> Before had been contriving?" — P. L., ix. 188, —

was or could be derived from any obscure source. The interval between excellence and mediocrity removes all connection: it is that between incurable impotence and genial creation. A great poet can never be essentially indebted even to his prototype.

If we may still be interested in watching the primitive vigor of the self-taught, compared with the intellectual ideal of the poetical character, we must not allow ourselves, as might be shown in one of the critics of the Saxon school, to mistake Nature in her first poverty, bare, meagre, squalid, for the moulded nudity of the Graces. The nature of Ennius was no more the nature of Virgil than the nature of Cædmon was that of Milton; for what is obvious and familiar is the reverse of the beautiful and the sublime. We have seen the ideal being, —

* This speech, in which Satan appeals to and characterizes his infernals, may be read in Parfait's analysis of the Mystery. — *Hist. du Théâtre François*, i. 79.

† *L'Angeleida* of VALVASONE, the *Adamo* of ANDREINI, and others. — HAYLEY'S *Conjectures on the Origin of Paradise Lost.* — See also Tiraboschi and Ginguéné

"Whose stature reached the sky, and on his crest
Sat Horror plumed," —

by the Saxon monk sunk down to a Saxon convict, "fastened by the neck, his hands manacled, and his feet bound."

Cædmon represents Eve, after having plucked the fruit, hastening to Adam with the apples: —

"Some in her hands she bare,
Some in her bosom lay,
Of the unblest fruit."

However natural or downright may be this specification, it is what could not have occurred with "the bosom" of our naked mother of mankind; and the artistical conception eluded the difficulty of carrying these apples: —

"From the tree returning, in her hand
A bough of fairest fruit." — ix. 850.

In Cædmon, it costs Eve a long day to persuade the sturdy Adam, an honest Saxon, to "the dark deed;" and her prudential argument, that "it were best to obey the pretended messenger of the Lord than risk his aversion," however natural, is very crafty for so young a sinner. In Milton we find the ideal; and, before Eve speaks, one may be certain of Adam's fall; for —

"In her face excuse
Came prologue, and apology too prompt,
Which, with bland words at will, she thus addressed."

A description too metaphysical for the meagre invention of the old Saxon monk.

We dare not place "the Milton of our forefathers" by the side of the only Milton whom the world will recognize. We would not compare our Saxon poetry to Saxon art, for that was too deplorable; but to place Cædmon in a parallel with Milton, which Plutarch might have done (for he was not very nice in his resemblances), we might as well compare the formless forms and the puerile inventions of the rude Saxon

artist, profusely exhibited in the drawings of the original manuscript of Cædmon,* with the noble conceptions and the immortal designs of the Sistine Chapel.

* These singular attempts at art may be inspected in above fifty plates, in the Archæologia, vol. xx. We may rejoice at their preservation; for Art, even in the attempts of its children, may excite ideas which might not else have occurred to us.

BEOWULF: THE HERO-LIFE.

THE Anglo-Saxon poetical narrative of "the Exploits of Beowulf" forms a striking contrast with the chronological paraphrase of Cædmon. Its genuine antiquity unquestionably renders it a singular curiosity; but it derives an additional interest from its representation of the primitive simplicity of a Homeric period, — the infancy of customs and manners and emotions of that hero-life, which the Homeric poems first painted for mankind; that hero-life of which Macpherson in his "Ossian" caught but imperfect conceptions from the fragments he may have collected, while he metamorphosed his ideal Celtic heroes into those of the sentimental romance of another age and another race.

The Northern hordes under their petty chieftains, cast into a parallel position with those princes of Greece whose realms were provinces and whose people were tribes, often resembled them in the like circumstances, the like characters, and the like manners. Such were those kinglings who could possess themselves of a territory in a single incursion, and whose younger brothers, stealing out of their lone bays, extended their dominion as "sea-kings" on the illimitable ocean.* The war-ship and the mead-hall bring us back to that early era of society, when great men knew only to be heroes, flattered by their bards, whose songs are ever the echoes of their age and their patrons.

* See the curious delineation of the Vikings of the North, in Turner's "Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons," i. 456, third edition.

We discover these heroes, Danes or Angles, as we find them in the Homeric period, audacious with the self-confidence of their bodily prowess; vaunting, and talkative of their sires and of themselves; the son ever known by denoting the father, and the father by his marriage alliance, — that primitive mode of recognition, at a period when, amid the perpetual conflicts of rival chieftains, scarcely any but relations could be friends. The family bond was a sure claim to protection. Like the Homeric heroes, they were as unrelenting in their hatreds as indissoluble in their partisanship; suspicious of the stranger, but welcoming the guest. We find them rapacious, for plunder was their treasure; and prodigal in their distributions of their golden armlets and weighed silver, for their egotism was as boundless as their violence. Yet pride and glory fermented the coarse leaven of these mighty marauders, who were even chivalric ere chivalry rose into an order. The religion of these ages was wild as their morality. Few heroes but bore some relationship to Woden; and, even in their rude paganized Christianity, some mythological name cast its lustre in their genealogies. In the uncritical chronicles of the middle ages, it is not always evident whether the mortal was not a divinity. Their mythic legends have thrown confusion into their national annals, often accepted by historians as authentic records.* But, if antiquaries still wander among shadows, the poet cannot err. BEOWULF may be a

* Mr. KEMBLE, the translator of BEOWULF, has extricated himself out of an extraordinary dilemma. The first volume, which exhibits the Anglo-Saxon text, furnished in the preface, with an elaborate abundance, all the historical elucidations of his unknown hero. Subsequently, when the second volume appeared, which contains the translation, it is preceded by "A Postscript to the Preface," far more important. Here, with the graceful repentance of precipitate youth, he moans over the past, and warns the reader of "the postscript to cut away the preface, root and branch," for all that he had published was delusion! — particularly "all that part of my preface which assigns dates to one prince or another, I declare to be null and void!" The result of all this scholar's painful researches is, that Mr. Kemble is left in darkness, with Beowulf in his hand; an ambiguous being,

god or a nonentity; but the poem which records his exploits must at least be true, — true in the manners it paints and the emotions which the poet reveals, — the emotions of his contemporaries.

BEOWULF,* a chieftain of the Western Danes, was the Achilles of the North. We first view him, with his followers, landing on the shores of a Danish kingling. A single ship with an armed company, in those predatory days, could alarm a whole realm. The petty independent provinces of Greece afford a parallel; for Thucydides has marked this period in society, when plunder well fought for was honored as an heroic enterprise. When a vessel touched on a strange shore, the adventurers were questioned "whether they were thieves," — a designation which the inquirers did not intend as a term of reproach: nor was it scorned by the valiant; †

whom the legend creates with supernatural energies, and history labors to reduce to mortal dimensions.

The fault is hardly that of our honest Anglo-Saxon, as trustful of the Danes as his forefathers were heretofore. It is these, our old masters, who, with Count Suhm, the voluminous annalist of Denmark, at their head, have "treated mythic and traditional matters as ascertained history. It is the old story of Minos, Lycurgus, or Numa, furbished up for us in the North." What a delightful phantasmagoria comes out while we remain in darkness! But a Danish Niebuhr may yet illuminate the whole theatre of this Pantheon.

* These Teutonic heroes were frequently denominated by the names of animals, which they sometimes emulated. Thus the hero exulting in bone and nerve was known as "the Bear;" the more insatiable, as "the Wolf;" and "the Wild Deer" is the common appellative of a warrior. The term "Deer" was the generic name for animal, and not then restricted to its present particular designation.

"Rats and mice, and such SMALL DEER,"

baffled our Shakspearian commentators, who rarely looked to the great source of the English language, — the Anglo-Saxon; and, in their perplexity, proposed to satisfy the modern reader by a botch of their own, and read *geer* or *cheer*. Percy discovered, in the old metrical romance of "Sir Bevis of Southampton," the very distich which Edgar had parodied. — *Warton*, iii. 88.

† Thucydides, lib. i.

for the spoliation of foreigners, at a time when the law of nations had no existence, seemed no disgrace, while it carried with it something of glory, when the chieftain's sword maintained the swarm of his followers, or acquired for himself an extended dominion.

Beowulf was a mailed knight, and his gilded ensign hung like a meteor in the air, and none knew the fate it portended. The warder of the coast (for in those days many a warder kept "ocean-watch" on the sea-cliffs) takes horse, and hastens to the invader. Fearlessly he asks, "Whence and what are ye? Soonest were best to give me answer."

The hero had come, not to seek feud nor to provoke insult, but with the free offering of his own life to relieve the sovereign of the Eastern Danes, whose thanes for twelve years had vainly perished, struggling with a mysterious being, — one of the accursed progeny of Cain, — a foul and solitary creature of the morass and the marsh. In the dead of the night, this enemy of man, envious of glory and abhorrent of pleasure, glided into the great hall of state and revelry, raging athirst for the blood of the brave there reposing in slumber. The tale had spread in songs through all Gothland. This life-devourer, who comes veiled in a mist from the marshes, may be some mythic being; but, though monstrous, it does little more than play the part of the Polyphemus of antiquity and the Ogre of modern fairyism.

In the timber-palace, chambers were but small and few; and the guests of the petty sovereign slept in the one great hall, under whose echoing roof the Witenagemot assembled, and the royal banquet was held. There each man had his "bed and bolster" laid out, with his shield at his head, and his hemlet, breastplate, and spear placed on a rack beside him, — "at all times ready for combat both in house and field."

This scene is truly Homeric; and thus we find in the early state of Greece; for the historian records this continual wear-

ing of armor, *like the barbarians*, because "their houses were unfenced, and travelling was unsafe." *

The watchman of the seas leaves not the coast, duteous in his lonely cares; while Beowulf, with his companions, marches onwards. They came to where the streets were paved; an indication, in that age, of a regal residence. The iron rings in their mailed coats rang as they trod in their "terrible armor." They reach the king's house: they hang up their shields against the lofty wall. They seat themselves on a bench, placing in a circle their mailed coats, their bucklers, and their javelins. This warlike array called forth an Ulysses, "famed for war and wisdom." They parley. The thane hastens to announce the warlike but the friendly visitor; and the hero, so famed for valor; yet would not obtrude his person, standing behind the thane; "for he knew the rule of ceremony." The prince of the East Danes joyfully exclaims, that "he had known Beowulf when a child: he remembered the name of his father, who married the only daughter of Hrethel the Goth. It is said that he has the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand. God only could have sent him."

Beowulf, he whose beautiful ship had come over "the swan-path," may now peacefully show himself in his warlike array. Beowulf stood upon the dais: his "sark of netted mail" glittered where the armorer's skill had wrought around the war-net. Here we discover the ornamental artist as in the Homeric period. He found the prince of the East Danes, "old and bald" like Priam, seated among his earls. Our hero, whom we have observed so decorous in "his rule of ceremony," now launches forth in the commendation of his own prowess.

He who had come to vanquish a fiend exulted not less in a swimming-match in the seas, "when the waves were boiling

* Thucydides.

with the fury of winter," during seven whole days and nights, combating with the walruses.

The exploits of Beowulf are of a supernatural cast; and this circumstance has bewildered his translator amid mythic allusions, and thus the hero sinks into the incarnation of a Saxon idol, — a protector of the human race. It is difficult to decide whether the marvellous incidents be mythical, or merely exaggerations of the Northern poetic faculty. We, however, learn by these, that corporeal energies and an indomitable spirit were the glories of the hero-life; and the outbreaks of their self-complacency resulted from their own convictions, after many a fierce trial.

Such an heroic race we deem barbarous; but what are the nobler spirits of all times but the creatures of their age? who, however favored by circumstances, can only do that which is practicable in the condition of society.

Henforth, the son of Eglaff, sate at the feet of the king. Jealousy stirred in his breast at the prowess of "the proud seafarer." This cynical minister of the king ridicules his youthful exploits, and sarcastically assured the hero, that "he has come to a worse matter now, should he dare to pass the space of one night with the fiend." This personage is the Thersites of our Northern Homer: —

> "With witty malice studious to defame;
> Scorn all his joy, and laughter all his aim."

And, like Thersites, the son of Eglaff receives a blasting reproach: "I tell thee, son of Eglaff, drunken with mead, that I have greater strength upon the sea than any other man. We two" (he alludes to his competitor), "when we were but boys, with our naked swords in our hands, where the waves were fiercest, warred with the walruses. The whale-fish dragged me to the bottom of the sea, grim in his gripe: the mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through my hand. The sea became calm, so that I beheld the ocean promontories,

as the light broke from the east. Never since have the sea-sailors been hindered of their way; never have I heard of a harder battle by night under the concave of heaven, nor of a man more wretched on the ocean-streams. Of such ambushes, and fervor of swords, I have not heard aught of thee; else had the fiend I come to vanquish never accomplished such horrors against thy prince. I boast not, therefore, son of Eglaff: but never have I slaughtered those of my kin; for which hast thou incurred damnation, though thy wit be good."

In this state of imperfect civilization, we discover already a right conception of the female character. At the banquet the queen appears. She greeted the young Goth, bearing in her own hand the bright sweet liquor in the twisted mead-cup. She went among the young and the old, mindful of their races. The free-born queen then sate beside the monarch. There was laughter of heroes. A bard sung serene on "the origin of things," as Iopas sang at the court of Dido, and Demodocus at that of Alcinous. The same bard again excites joy in the hall by some warlike tale. Never was banquet without poet in the Homeric times.

Here our task ends, which was not to analyze the tale of Beowulf, but solely to exhibit the manners of a primeval epoch in society. The whole romance, though but short, bears another striking feature of the mighty minstrel of antiquity. It is far more dramatic than narrative; for the characters discover themselves more by dialogue than by action.

The literary history of this Anglo-Saxon metrical romance is too remarkable to be omitted. It not only cast a new light on a disputed object in our own literary history, but awoke the patriotism of a foreign nation. Beowulf had shared the fate of Cædmon; being preserved only in a single manuscript in the Cottonian Library, where it escaped from the destructive fire of 1731, — not, however, without injury. In 1705,

Wanley had attempted to describe it; but he did not surmount the difficulty. Our literary antiquaries, with Ritson for their leader, stubbornly asserted that the Anglo-Saxons had no metrical romance, as they opined by their scanty remains. The learned historian of our Anglo-Saxons, in the progress of his ceaseless pursuit, unburied this hidden treasure, which at once refuted the prevalent notions; but this literary curiosity was fated to excite deeper emotions among the honest Danes.

The existing manuscript of "the Exploits of Beowulf" is of the tenth century; but the poem was evidently composed at a far remoter period: though, as all the personages of the romance are Danes, and all the circumstances are Danish, it may be conjectured, if it be an original Anglo-Saxon poem, that it was written when the Danes had a settlement in some parts of Britain. At Copenhagen, the patriotism of literature is ardent. The learned there claimed Beowulf as their own, and alleged that the Anglo-Saxon was the version of a Danish poem. It became one of the most ancient monuments of the early history of their country, and not the least precious to them for its connection with English affairs. The Danish antiquaries still amuse their imagination with the once Danish kingdom of Northumbria, and still call us "brothers;" as at Caen, where the whole academy still persist in disputations on the tapestry of Bayeux, and style themselves our "masters."

It was therefore a national mortification to the Danes, that it was an Englishman who had first made known this relic; and further, that it existed only in the library of England. The learned THORKELIN was despatched on a literary expedition, and a careful transcript of the manuscript of Beowulf was brought to the learned and patriotic Danes. It was finished for the press, accompanied by a translation and a commentary, in 1807. At the siege of Copenhagen, a British bomb fell on the study of the hapless scholar, annihilating "Beowulf," transcript, translation, and commentary, — the toil

of twenty years. It seemed to be felt by the few, whose losses by sieges never appear in royal gazettes, as not one of the least in that sad day of warfare with "our brothers." THORKELIN was urged to restore the loss. But it was under great disadvantages that his edition was published in 1815. Mr. Kemble has redeemed our honor by publishing a collated edition, afterwards corrected in a second with a literal version. Such versions may supply the wants of the philologist; but, for the general reader, they are doomed to be read like vocabularies. Yet, even thus humbled and obscured, BEOWULF aspires to a poetic existence. He appeals to nature, and excites our imagination; while the monk CÆDMON, restricted by his faithful creed and his pertinacious chronology, seems to have afforded more delight by his piety than the other by his genius, and remains renowned as "the Milton of our forefathers."

THE ANGLO-NORMANS.

THE Anglo-Saxon dominion in England endured for more than five centuries.

A territorial people had ceased to be roving invaders, but stood themselves in dread of the invasions of their own ancient brotherhood. They trembled on their own shores at those predatory hordes who might have reminded them of the lost valor of their own ancestors. But their warlike independence had passed away; and, as a martial abbot declared of his countrymen, "they had taken their swords from their sides, and had laid them on the altar, where they had rusted, and their edges were now too dull for the field." * They could not even protect the soil which they had conquered, and often wanted the courage to choose a king of their own race. Sometimes they stood ready to pay tribute to the Dane, and sometimes suffered the throne to be occupied by a Danish monarch. In a state of semi-civilization, their rude luxury hardly veiled their unintellectual character. Feeble sovereigns and a submissive people could not advance into national greatness.

When the Duke of Normandy visited his friend and kinsman, Edward the Confessor, he beheld in England a mimetic Normandy: Norman favorites were courtiers, and Norman soldiers were seen in Saxon castles. Edward, long estranged from his native realm, had received his education in Nor-

* Speed, 441. This was said to "the Conqueror;" and this Abbot of St. Alban's paid dearly for the patriotism which had then become treason.

mandy; and the English court affected to imitate the domestic habits of these French neighbors, — the great speaking the foreign idiom in their houses, and writing in French their bills and accompts.* Already there was a faction of Frenchified Saxons in the court of the unnational English sovereign.

William the Norman surveyed an empire already half Norman; and in the prospect, with his accustomed foresight, he mused on a doubtful succession. A people who had often suffered themselves to fall the prey of their hardier neighbor, lie open for conquest to a more intelligent and polished race.

The victory of Hastings did not necessarily include the conquest of the people, and William still condescended to march to the throne under the shadow of a title. After a short residence of only three months in his newly acquired realm, "the Conqueror" withdrew into his duchy, and there passed a long interval of nine months. William left many an unyielding Saxon: a spirit of resistance, however suppressed, bound men together, and partial insurrections seemed to be pushing on a crisis which might have reversed the conquest of England.†

* A circumstance which Milton has recorded.

† Our great lawyers probably imagined that the honor of the country is implicated in the title usually accorded to William the Norman. SPELMAN, the great antiquary, and BLACKSTONE, the historian and the expounder of our laws, have absolutely explained away the assumed title of "the Conqueror" to a mere technical feudal term of "*conquestor, or acquirer of any estate out of the common course of inheritance.*" The first purchaser (that is, he who brought the estate into the family which at present owns it) was styled "the Conqueror;" *and such is still the proper phrase in the law of Scotland.* RITSON is indignant at what he calls "a pitiful forensic quibble."

But another great lawyer and lord-chancellor, the sedate WHITELOCKE, positively asserts that "William only conquered Harold and his army; for he never was, nor *pretended to be*, the conqueror of England, although the *sycophant monks of the time* gave him that title." — WHITELOCKE'S *Hist. of England*, 33.

In a charter granting certain lands for the Church of St. Paul's, which Stowe has translated from the record in the Tower, William denominates himself, "by the grace of God, *king of Englishmen*" (*Rex Anglorum*); and

During this mysterious and protracted visit, and apparent abandonment of his new kingdom to the care of others, was a vast scheme of dominion nursed in the councils of Norman nobles, and strengthened by the boundless devotion of hardy adventurers, who were all to share in the present spoliation and the future royalty? In his prescient view, did William there anticipate a conquest of long labor and of distant days; the state, the nobles, the ecclesiastics, the people, the land, and the language, all to be changed? Hume has ventured to surmise that the mind of the Norman labored with this gigantic fabric of dominion. It is probable, however, that this child of a novel policy was submitted to a more natural gestation, and expanded as circumstances favored its awful growth. One night in December, the king suddenly appeared in England; and soon unlimited confiscations and royal grants apportioned the land of the Saxons among the lords of Normandy, and even their lance-bearers. It seemed as if every new-comer brought his castles with him, so rapidly did castles cover the soil.* These were strongholds for the tyrant

addresses it "to all his well-beloved *French and English people*, greeting." — STOWE'S *Survey of London*, 326, edit. 1603. Did William on any occasion declare that he was "the Conqueror" as well as the sovereign of England? When William attempted to learn the Saxon language, it is obvious that he did not desire to remind his new subjects that he ruled as Voltaire sung of his hero: —

"Qui regna sur la France,
Par droit de Conquête et par droit de Naissance."

* The final history of these citadels may illustrate that verse of Goldsmith which reminds us, —

"To fly from PETTY TYRANTS — TO THE THRONE!"

In the short space of seventy years, the owners of those castles bearded even majesty itself. These lords, by their undue share of power, were in perpetual revolt, till two royal persons, though opposed to each other, — Stephen and Maude, — decreed, for their mutual interest, the demolition of fifteen hundred and fifteen castles. They were razed by commission, or by writs to the sheriffs; and a law was further enacted, that "none hereafter, without license, should embattle his house." And thus was broken this aristocracy of castles. — See two dissertations on "Castles," by Sir ROBERT

foreigner, or open retreats for his predatory bands: stern overlookers were they of the land!

The Norman lords had courts of their own; sworn vassals to their suzerain, but kinglings to the people. Sometimes they beheld a Saxon lord, whose heart could not tear itself from the lands of his race, a serf on his own soil; but they witnessed without remorse the rights of the sword. Norman prelates were silently substituted for Saxon ecclesiastics, and whole companies of claimants arrived to steal into benefices or rush into abbeys. It was sufficient to be a foreigner, and land in England, to become a bishop or an abbot. Church and State were now indissolubly joined; for, in the general plunder, each took their orderly rank. It was the triumph of an enlightened, perhaps a cunning race, as the Norman has been proverbially commemorated, over "a rustic and almost an illiterate generation," as the simplicity of our Saxon prelates, who could not always speak French, is described by Ordericus Vitalis, a monk, who, long absent from England, wrote in Normandy. Ingulphus, the monk of Croyland, though partial to "the Conqueror," however, honestly confesses, that, when the English were driven from their dignities, their successors were not always their superiors.

All who were eager to court their new lords were brought to dissemble their native rusticity. They polled their crowns; they cut short their flowing hair; and, throwing aside the loose Saxon gown, they assumed the close vest of the more agile Norman. "Mail of iron, and coats of steel, would have better become them!" cried an indignant Saxon. We have

SUTTON and by AGARD; "Curious Discourses by Eminent Antiquaries," i. 104 and 188.

This number of castles seems incredible: possibly many were "embattled houses." My learned friend, the Rev. Joseph Hunter, an antiquary most versant in manuscripts, inclines to think there may be some scriptural error of the ancient scribe, who was likely to add or to leave out a cipher, without much comprehension of the numerals he was transcribing without a thought, like what happened to the eleven thousand virgins of St. Ursula.

seen what a martial Saxon abbot declared to the Conqueror, while he mourned over his pacific countrymen. This was the time when it was held a shame among Englishmen to appear English. It became proverbial to describe a Saxon who ambitioned some distinguished rank, that "he would be a gentleman if he could but talk French."

Fertile in novelties as was this amazing revolution, the most peculiar was the change of the language. The style of power and authority was Norman: it interpreted the laws, and it was even to torment the rising generation of England. Children learned the strange idiom by construing their Latin into French; and thus, by learning two foreign languages together, wholly unlearned their own. Not only were they taught to speak French, but the French character was adopted in place of their own alphabet. It was a flagrant instance of the Conqueror's design to annihilate the national language, that, finding a college at Oxford with an establishment founded by Alfred to maintain divines who were "to instruct the people in their own vulgar tongue," William decreed that "the annual expense should never after be allowed out of the king's exchequer." *

The Norman prince, on his first arrival, could have entertained no scheme of changing the language; for he attempted to acquire it. The secretary of the Conqueror has recorded, that when the monarch seemed inclined to adopt the customs of his new subjects, which his moderate measures at first indicated, the Norman prince had tried his patience and his ear to babble the obdurate idiom, till he abhorred the sound of the Saxon tongue. If, because the Conqueror could not learn the Saxon language, he decided wholly to abolish it, this would seem nothing more than a fantastic tyranny; but, in truth, the language of the conquered is usually held in contempt by the conquerors, for other reasons besides offending the delicacy of the ear. The Normans could not endure the

* Speed, 440.

Saxon's untunable consonants, as it had occurred even to the unlettered Saxons themselves; for, barbarians as their hordes were when they first became the masters of Britain, they had declared that the British tongue was utterly barbarous.*

But not at his bidding could the military chief for ever silence the mother-tongue. Enough for "this stern man" to guard the land in peace, while every single hyde of land in England was known to him, and "put at its worth in HIS BOOK," as records the Saxon chronicler. The language of a people is not to be conquered as the people themselves. The "birth-tongue" may be imprisoned or banished; but it cannot die. The people think in it. The images of their thoughts, their traditional phrases, the carol over the mead-cup, and their customs far diffused, survived even the iron tongue of the curfew.

The Saxons themselves, who had chased the native Britons from their land, still found that they could not suppress the language of the fugitive people. The conquerors gave their Anglo-Saxon denominations to the towns and villages they built; but the hills, the forests, and the rivers retain their old Celtic names.† Nature and nationality will outlast the transient policy of a new dynasty.

The novel idiom became the language of those only with whom the court-language, whatever it be, will ever prevail,—the men who, by their contiguity to the great, affect to participate in their influence. In that magic circle of hopes and fears, where royalty is the sole magician of the fortunes of

* A curious fact, discovered by Mr. Turner in a Cottonian manuscript, has brought this circumstance to our knowledge. In a grant of land in Cornwall, an Anglo-Saxon king, after mentioning the Saxon name of the place, adds, "Which the inhabitants there called *barbarico nomine*, by the barbarous name of Pendyfig;" which was the British or Welsh name.—*Vindication of the Ancient British Poems*, 8.

† Camden has noticed this striking circumstance in his "Britannia."—See also Percy's Preface to Mallett's "Northern Antiquities," xxxix.

men, the Conqueror perpetuated his power by perpetuating his language. Ignorance of the French tongue was deemed a sufficient pretext for banishing an English bishop, pertinacious in his nationality, who had for a while been admitted to the royal councils, but whose presence was no longer necessary to the dominant party.

To the successors of the Norman William, it might appear that the English idiom was wholly obliterated from the memories of men. Not one of our monarchs and statesmen could understand the most ordinary words in the national tongue. When Henry the Second was in Pembrokeshire, and was addressed in English, "Goode olde kynge," the King of England inquired in French of his esquire what was meant! Of the title of "kynge," we are told that his majesty was wholly ignorant! A ludicrous anecdote of the chancellor of Richard the First is a strange evidence that the English language was wholly a foreign one for the English court. This chancellor, in his flight from Canterbury, disguised as a female hawker, carrying under his arm a bundle of cloth, and an ell-measure in his hand, sate by the sea-side, waiting for a vessel. The fishermen's wives inquired the price of the cloth. He could only answer by a burst of laughter; for this man, born in England, and chancellor of England, did not know a single word of English! One more evidence will confirm how utterly the Saxon language was cast away. When the famous Grosteste, Bishop of Lincoln (who would, no doubt, have contemned his Saxon surname of "Great-head"), a voluminous writer, once condescended to instruct "the ignorant," he wrote pious books for their use in French; the bishop making no account of the old national language, nor of the souls of those who spoke it.

When the fate of conquest had overthrown the national language, and thus seemed to have bereaved us of all our literature, it was, in reality, only diverging into a new course. For three centuries, the popular writers of England composed in the French language. Gaimar, who wrote on our Saxon

history; Wace, whose chronicle is a rhymed version of that of Geoffry of Monmouth; Benoit de Saint Maur (or Seymour); Pierre Langtoft, who composed a history of England; Hugh de Rotelande (Rutland), and so many others, — were all English. Some were descendants from Norman progenitors; but, in every other respect, they were English. Some were of a third generation.

Our Henry the Third was a prodigal patron of these Anglo-Norman poets. This monarch awarded to a romancer, Rusticien de Pise, who has proclaimed the regal munificence to the world, a couple of fine "chateaux;" which I would not, however, translate as has been done by the English term "castles." Well might a romancer, so richly remunerated, promise his royal patron to finish "the Book of Brut," the never-ending theme to the ear of a British monarch, who, indeed, was anxious to possess such an authentic state-paper. Who this Rusticien de Pise was, one cannot be certain; but he was one of a numerous brood, who, stimulated by "largesses" and fair chateaux, delighted to celebrate the chivalry of the British court, to them a perpetual fountain of honor and preferment. We may now smile at the Count de Tressan's querulous nationality, who is indignant that the writers of the French romances of the Round Table show a marked affectation of dwelling on every thing that can contribute to the glory of the throne and court of England; preferring a fabulous Arthur to a true Charlemagne, and English knights to French paladins.* When Tressan wrote, this striking circumstance had not received its true elucidation: the hand of these writers had only flowed with their gratitude. These writers composed to gratify their sovereign, or some noble patron at the English court; for they were English natives or English subjects, long concealed from posterity as Englishmen by writing in French. It had then escaped the notice of our literary antiquaries at

* See his Preface to the prose romance of "La Fleur des Batailles."

home and abroad, that these Englishmen could have composed in no other language. How imperfect is the catalogue of early English poets by Ritson! — for it is since his day that this important fact in our own literary history has been acknowledged by the French themselves, who at length have distinguished between Norman and Anglo-Norman poets. M. Guizot was enabled by the French Government to indulge his literary patriotism by sending a skilful collector to England to search in our libraries for Norman writings; and we are told that none but Anglo-Norman writers have been found, — that is, Englishmen writing on English affairs, and so English, that they have not always avoided an unguarded expression of their dislike of foreigners, and even of Normans.

It is worthy of observation, that even those Norman writers who came young into England soon took the color of the soil; and what rather surprises us, considering the fashion of the court at that period, studied the original national language, translated our Saxon writings, and often mingled in their French verse phrases and terms which to this day we recognize as English. Of this we have an interesting evidence in an Anglo-Norman poetess, but recently known by the name of "Marie de France;" yet had she not written this single verse accidentally, —

> "Me nummerai par remembrance,
> *Marie ai num, si sui de France,*" —

we should, from her subjects and her perfect knowledge of the vernacular idiom of the English, have placed this Sappho of the thirteenth century among the women of England. This poetess tells us that she had turned into her French rhymed verse the Æsopian Fables, which one of our kings had translated into English from the Latin. This royal author could have been no other than Alfred, to whom such a collection has been ascribed. We learn from herself the occasion of her version. Her task was performed for a great personage who

read neither Latin nor English: it was done for "the *love* of the renowned Earl William Longsword," —

"Cunte Willaume,
Le plus vaillant de cest Royaume."

Who would calculate the "largesse" "Count William," this puissant Longsword, cast into the lap of this living Muse, when she offered all this melodious wisdom; whose beautiful simplicity a child might comprehend, but whose moral and politic truths would throw even the Norman Longsword into a state of rational musing? Her "Lais," short but wild "Breton Tales," which our poetess dedicated to her sovereign, our Henry the Third, are evidence that Marie could also skilfully touch the heart and amuse the fancy.

In her poems, Marie has translated many French terms into pure English, and abounds with allusions to English places and towns whose names have not changed since the thirteenth century. Her local allusions, and her familiar knowledge of the vernacular idiom of the English people, prove that "Marie," though by the accident of birth she may be claimed by France, yet by her early and permanent residence, and by the constant subjects of her writings, her "Breton Tales," and her "Fables" from the English, by her habits and her sympathies, was an Englishwoman.

At this extraordinary period, when England was a foreign kingdom, the English people found some solitary friends; and these were the rustic monk and the itinerant minstrel; for they were Saxons, but subjects too mean and remote for the gripe of the Norman, occupied in rooting out their lords to plant his own for ever in the Saxon soil.

The monks, who lived rusticated in their scattered monasteries, sojourners in the midst of their conquered land, often felt their Saxon blood tingle in their veins. Not only did the filial love of their country deepen their sympathies, but a more personal indignation rankled in their secret bosoms at

the foreign intruders, French or Italian, — the tyrannical bishop and the voluptuous abbot. There were indeed monks, and some have been our chroniclers, base-born, humiliated, and living in fear, who in their leiger-books, when they alluded to their new masters, called them "the conquerors," noticed the year when some "conqueror" came in, and recorded what "the conquerors" had enacted. All these "conquerors" designated the foreigners, who were the heads of their houses. But there were other truer Saxons. Inspired equally by their public and their private feeling, these were the first, who, throwing aside both Latin and French, addressed the people in the only language intelligible to them. The patriotic monks decided that the people should be reminded that they were Saxons; and they continued their history in their own language.

This precious relic has come down to us, — the "Saxon Chronicle," * — but which in fact is a collection of chronicles made by different persons. These Saxon annalists had been eye-witnesses of the transactions they recorded; and this singular detail of incidents as they occurred, without comment, is a phenomenon in the history of mankind, like that of the history of the Jews contained in the Old Testament, and, like that, as its learned editor has ably observed, "a regular and chronological panorama of a people described in rapid succession by different writers, through many ages, in their own VERNACULAR LANGUAGE." The mutations in the language of this ancient chronicle are as remarkable as the fortunes of

* Miss Gurney, who has honorably been hailed as "the Elstob of her age," privately printed her own close version of the "Saxon Chronicle" from the printed text, 1810. Happy lady! who, when sickness had made her its prisoner, opened the "Saxon Chronicle;" and she learned that she might teach the learned.

The Rev. Dr. INGRAM, principal of Trinity College, Oxon, has since published his translation, accompanied by the original, a collation of the manuscripts, and notes critical and explanatory. 1823. 4to. A volume not less valuable than curious.

the nation in its progress from rudeness to refinement; nor less observable are the entries in this great political register from the year one of Christ till 1154, when it abruptly terminates. The meagreness of the earlier recorders contrasts with the more impressive detail of later enlarged and thoughtful minds. When we come to William of Normandy, we have a character of that monarch by one who knew him personally, having lived at his court. It is not only a masterly delineation, but a skilful and steady dissection. The earlier Saxon chronicler has recorded a defeat and retreat which Cæsar suffered in his first invasion, which would be difficult to discover in the Commentaries of Cæsar.

The true language of the people lingered on their lips, and it seemed to bestow a shadowy independence to a population in bondage. The remoter the locality, the more obdurate was the Saxon; and these indwellers were latterly distinguished as "Uplandish" by the inhabitants of cities. For about two centuries, "the Uplandish" held no social connection. Separated not only by distance, but by their isolated dialects and peculiar customs, these natives of the soil shrunk into themselves, intermarrying and dying on the same spot. They were hardly aware that they were without a country.

It was a great result of the Norman Government in England, that it associated our insular and retired dominion with that nobler theatre of human affairs, — the Continent of Europe. In Normandy we trace the first footings of our national power: the English sovereign, now a prince of France, ere long on the French soil vied in magnitude of territory with his paramount lord, the monarch of France. Such a permanent connection could not fail to produce a conformity in manners. What was passing among our closest neighbors, rivals or associates, was reflected in the old Saxon land which had lost its nationality.

THE PAGE, THE BARON, AND THE MINSTREL.

WHEN learning was solely ecclesiastical and scholastical, there were no preceptors for mankind. The monastery and the university were far removed from the sympathies of daily life: all knowledge was out of the reach of the layman. It was then that the energies of men formed a course of practical pursuits, a system of education of their own. The singular institution of chivalry rose out of a combination of circumstances, where, rudeness and luxury mingling together, the utmost refinement was found compatible with barbaric grandeur, and holy justice with generous power. In lawless times, they invented a single law which included a whole code, — the law of knightly honor. *L'Ordenne de Chevalerie* is the morality of knighthood, and invests the aspirant with every moral and political virtue as every military qualification.*

Destitute of a national education, the higher orders thus found a substitute in a conventional system of manners. Circumstances, perhaps originally accidental, became customs sealed with the sign of honor. In this moral chaos, order marshalled confusion, as refinement adorned barbarism. A

* St. Palaye, to whom we owe the ideal of chivalry, has truly observed, "Toutes les vertus recommandées par la Chevalerie tournoient au bien public, au profit de l'Etat." It was when the causes of its institution ceased, and nothing remained but its forms without its motive, that altered manners could safely ridicule some noble qualities, which, though now displaced, have not always found equal substitutes. In the advancement of society, we may count some losses.

mighty spirit lay, as it were, in disguise; and it broke out in the forms of imagination, passion, and magnificence, seeking their objects or their semblance, and if sometimes mistaken, yet still laying the foundations of social order and national glory in Europe.

A regular course of practical pursuits was assigned to the future noble "childe" from the day that he left the parental roof for the baronial hall of his patron. In these "nurseries of nobility," as Jonson has well described such an institution, in his first charge as varlet or page, the boy of seven years was an attendant at the baron's table; and it was no humiliating office when the youth grew to be the carver and the cupbearer. He played on the viol or danced in the brawls till he was more gravely trained in "the mysteries of woods and rivers," the arts of the chase, and the sciences of the swanery and the heronry and the fishery. The springal cheerily sounded a blast of venery; or the falconer with his voice caressed his attentive hawk, which had not obeyed him had he neglected that daily flattery.

At fourteen the varlet became an esquire, vaulting on his fiery steed; and perfecting himself in all noble exercises, — nicely adroit in the science of "courtesie," or the etiquette of the court; and already this "servant of love" was taught to elect *La dame de ses pensées*, and wore her favor and her livery for "the love of honor, or the honor of love," as Sir Philip Sidney, in the style of chivalry, expressed it.

At the maturity of twenty and one years, the late varlet, and now the esquire, stood forth a candidate to blazon his shield by knighthood, — the accomplished gentleman of these Gothic days, and right learned too, if he can con his Bible and read his romance. Enchanting mirror of all chivalry, if he invent songs, and set them to his own melodies. Yet will the gentle "batchelor" be dreaming on some gallant feat of arms, or some martial achievement, whereby "to win his spurs." On his solemn entrance into the church, laying

his sword upon the altar, he resumed it by the oath which for ever bound him to defend the church and the churchmen. Thus all human affairs then were rounded by the ecclesiastical orbit, out of which no foot dared to stray. All began and all ended as the romances which formed his whole course of instruction, — with the devotion which seemed to have been addressed to man as much as to Heaven.

After the termination of the Crusades, the grand incident in the life of the BARON was a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem. What the penitent of the Cross had failed to conquer, it seemed a consolation to kneel at and to weep over, — a custom not obsolete so late as the reigns of our last Henrys; and still, though less publicly avowed, the melancholy Jerusalem witnesses the Hebrew and the Christian performing some secret vow, to grieve with a contrition which it seems they do not feel at home.

In these peregrinations, a lordly Briton might chance to find some French or Italian knight as rash and as haughty. It was a law in chivalry, that a knight should not give way to any man who demanded it as a right, nor decline the single combat with any knight under the sun: a challenge could not, therefore, be avoided. But a *pas d'armes* was not always a friendly invitation; for often, under the guise of chivalry, was concealed the national hostility of the parties.

But when no crusade nor pilgrimage in the East, nor predatory excursion in the West, nor even the blazonry of a tournament, which fed his eyes with a picture of battle, summoned to put on his mail-coat, how was the vacant lord to wear out his monotonous days in his castle of indolence? The domestic fool stood beside him, archly sad, or gravely mirthful, as his master willed, with a proverb or a quip; and, with his licensed bawble, was the most bitterly wisest man in the castle. Patron of the costly manuscript which he could not himself read, the romancer of his household awaited his

call: the great then had fabulators or tale-tellers, as royalty has now, by title of their office, its readers. But this lord was too vigorous for repose, and the tranquillity of chess was too trying for his brain: the chess-board was often broken about the head of some mute dependant, or perchance on one who returned the dagger for the board. There was little peace for his restlessness, when, weary in his seat, his priceless Norway hawk perched above his head,* and his idle hounds spread over the floor, ceaselessly reminded him of those wide and frowning forests which were continually encroaching on the tillage of the contemned agriculturist, offering a mimetic war, not only against the bird and the beast, but man himself; for the lairs of the forest concealed the deer he chased, and often the bandit who chased the lord, — the terrible lord of this realm of wood and water, where whoever would fowl a bird or strike a buck might have his eyes torn from their sockets, or, on the spot of his offence, mount the instant gallows.†

There was a disorderly grandeur about the castellated mansion which should have required the ukase of this sovereign of many leagues, surrounded by many hundreds of his retainers; but rarely the cry of the oppressed was allowed to disturb the lord, while all within were exact in their appointments, as clock-work movements which were wound up in the government of these immense domestic establishments. Great families had their "household-books;" and, in some, the illegible hand of the lordly master himself, when the day arrived that even barons were incited to scriptural attempts,

* I recollect this trait in Chaucer. The Norway hawk was among the most valuable articles of property, valued at a sum equal to £800 of the present day. — NICHOLLS: *History of Leicestershire*, xxxix.

† The Norman William punished men with loss of eyes for taking his venery. — *Selden's Notes to Drayton's Polyolbion*, song ii.

An instant execution of two youths by the gamekeepers, at the command of their lord, appears in an ancient romance recently published in France. — *Journal des Savans*, 1888.

may yet be seen.* These nobles, it appears, were more select in their falconer and their *chef de cuisine* than in their domestic tutor; for such there was among the retainers of the household. This humiliated sage, indeed, in his own person was a model for the young varlets, on whom it was his office to inculcate that patient suppleness, and profound reverence for their lord and their superiors, which seemed to form the single principle of their education. At this period, we find a domestic proverb which evidently came from the buttery. As then eight or ten tables were to be daily covered, it is probable the chivalric epicures sometimes found their tastes disappointed by the culinary artists. It would seem that this put them into sudden outbreakings of ill-humor; for the proverb records that "the minstrels are often beaten for the faults of the cooks."

Too much leisure, too many loungers, and the tedium of prolonged banquets, a want of the pleasures of the luxurious sedentary would be as urgent as in ages more intellectual and refined; those pleasures in which we participate, though we are passive, receiving the impressions without any exertion of our own, — pleasures which make us delighted auditors or spectators. The theatre was not yet raised; but the listlessness of vacuity gave birth to all the variegated artists of revelry. If they had not comedy itself, they abounded with the comic; and, without tragedy, the tragic often moved their emotions. Nor were they even then without their scenical

* A curious specimen of these "household-books," though of a later period, is that of the Northumberland Family, printed by Bishop Percy. Many exist in manuscript, and contain particulars more valuable than the prices of commodities, for which they are usually valued. They offer striking pictures of the manners of their age. [The wardrobe accounts of Edward the Fourth, the privy purse expenses of Edward IV. and Henry VIII., have been since published by Sir Harris Nicolas; and those of the Princess Mary, afterwards Queen, by Sir Frederick Madden. The judicious notes and dissertations of these editors render them of much use in illustration of the history of each era. — Ed.]

illusions; marvels which came and vanished, as the Tregetour clapped his hands; enchantments, which, though Chaucer opined to be only "natural magic," all the world tremblingly enjoyed as the work of devils; a sensation which we have totally lost in the necromancy of our pantomimes. And thus it was, that, in the illumed hall of the feudal lord, we discover a whole dramatic company, which, however dissimilar in their professional arts, were all enlisted under the indefinite class of MINSTRELS; for, in the domestic state of society we are now recalling, the poetic minstrel must be separated from those other minstrels of very different acquirements, with whom, however, he was associated.

There were minstrels who held honorable offices in the great households, sometimes chosen for their skill and elocution to perform the dignified service of heralds, and were in the secret confidence of their lord: these were those favorites of the castle, whose guerdon was sometimes as romantic as any incident in their own romance.

No festival, public or private, but there the minstrel-poet was its crowning ornament. They awakened national themes in the presence of assembled thousands at the installation of an abbot or the reception of a bishop.* Often in the Gothic hall they resounded some lofty "Geste" or some old "Breton" lay; or with some gayer fabliau, indulging the vein of an improvvisatore, altering the old story when wanting a new one. Delightful rhapsodists or amusing tale-tellers, combining the poetic with the musical character, they displayed the influence of the imagination over a rude and unlettered race: —

"They tellen Tales
Both of WEEPYING and of GAME."

Chaucer has portrayed the rapture of a minstrel excited by his harp, — a portrait evidently after the life: —

* "Warton," i. 94.

"Somewhat he *lisped* for his wantonness
To make the English swete upon his tonge;
And in his Harping, when that he had songe,
His Eyen twinkled in his Hed aright,
As don the Sterrés in a frosty night."

The minstrel more particularly delighted "the Lewed," or the people, when, sitting in their fellowship, the harper stilled their attention by some fragment of a chronicle of their fathers and their father-land. The family harper touched more personal sympathies: the ancestral honors of the baron made even the vassal proud; domestic traditions and local incidents deepened their emotions; the moralizing ditty softened their mind with thought; and every county had its legend, at which the heart of the native beat. Of this minstrelsy, little was written down; but tradition lives through a hundred echoes, and the "reliques of ancient English poetry," and the minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, and some other remains, for the greater part, have been formed by so many metrical narratives and fugitive effusions.

There were periods in which the minstrels were so highly favored, that they were more amply rewarded than the clergy, — a circumstance which induced Warton to observe, with more truth than acuteness, that "in this age, as in more enlightened times, the people loved better to be pleased than to be instructed."* Such was their fascination and their passion for "largesse," that they were reproached with draining the treasury of a prince. It is certain that this thoughtless race have suffered from the evil eye of the monkish chroniclers, who looked on the minstrels as their rivals in sharing the prodigality of the great; yet even their monkish censors relented whenever these revellers appeared. It was a festive day among so many joyless ones, when the minstrel band approached the lone monastery. Then the sweet-toned vielle or the merry rebec echoed in the hermit-hearts of the

* "Warton," ii. 412.

slumbering inmates; vaulters came tumbling about, jugglers bewitched their eyes, and the grotesque mime, who would not be outdone by his tutored ape. Then came the stately minstrel, with his harp borne before him by his smiling page, usually called "the minstrel's boy." One of the brotherhood has described the strolling troop, who —

"Walken fer and wyde,
Her and ther, in every syde,
In many a diverse londe."

The easy life of these ambulatory musicians, their ample gratuities, and certain privileges which the minstrels enjoyed both here and among our neighbors, corrupted their manners, and induced the dissipated and the reckless to claim those privileges by assuming their title. A disorderly rabble of minstrels crowded every public assembly, and haunted the private abode. At different periods, the minstrels were banished the kingdom, in England and in France; but their return was rarely delayed. The people could not be made to abandon these versatile dispensers of solace, amid their own monotonous cares.

At different periods, minstrels appear to have been persons of great wealth, — a circumstance which we discover by their votive religious acts in the spirit and custom of those days. The Priory of St. Bartholomew in Smithfield, in 1102, was founded by "Rahere," the king's minstrel, who is described as "a pleasant-witted gentleman," such as we may imagine a wealthy minstrel, and moreover "the king's," ever to have been.* In St. Mary's Church, at Beverley in Yorkshire,

* Stowe's "Survey by Strype," book iii. 235. We might wish to learn the authority of Stowe for ascribing this "pleasant wit" to Rahere of the eleventh century. As the pen of venerable Stowe never moved idly, our antiquary must have had some information which is now lost. "The king's minstrel" is also a doubtful designation. Was the founder of this priory "a king of the minstrels"? — an office which the French also had, *Roy des Ménestraulx*, — a governor instituted to keep order among all minstrels. Our Rahere, however "pleasant-witted," seems to have fallen into penance for his "wit;" for he became the first prior.

stands a noble column covered with figures of minstrels, inscribed, "This Pillar made the Minstrels;" and, at Paris, a chapel dedicated to St. Julian of the Minstrels was erected by them, covered with figures of minstrels, bearing all the instruments of music used in the middle ages, where the violin, or fiddle, is minutely sculptured.*

If, in these ages of romance and romancers, the fair sex were rarely approached without the devotion of idolatry, whenever "the course of true love" altered; when the frail spirit loved too late, and should not have loved, — the punishment became more criminal than the crime: for there was more of selfish revenge and terrific malignity than of justice, when autocratical man became the executioner of his own decree. The domestic chronicles of these times exhibit such harrowing incidents as those of "La Châtelaine de Vergy," where suddenly a scene of immolation struck through the devoted household; or that of "La Dame du Fayel," † who was made to eat her lover's heart. And those who had not to punish, but to put to trial, the affections of women who were in their power, had their terrible caprices, — a ferocity in their barbarous loves. Year after year, the Gothic lord

* *Antiquités Nationales*, par Millin, xli. Two plates exhibit this Gothic chapel and the various musical instruments.

† Both these romantic tales may be considered as authentic narratives, though they have often been used by the writers of fiction. *La Châtelaine de Vergy* has been sometimes confounded with *Le Châtelaine de Coucy*, the lover of *La Dame du Fayel*. The story of the Countess of Vergy (on which a romance of the thirteenth century is founded, "Hist. Litt. de France," xviii. 779) has been a favorite with the tale-tellers, — the Queen of Navarre, Bandello, and Belle Forest; and is elegantly versified in the "Fabliaux, or Tales," of Way. That of the Dame du Fayel, one of the fathers of French literary history, old Fauchet, extracted it from a good old chronicle dated two centuries before he wrote. The story is also found in an ancient romance of the thirteenth century, in the Royal Library of France. — *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xiv. 589; xvii. 644. The story of "Childe Waters," in Percy's Collection, has all the pathetic simplicity of ancient minstrelsy, which is more forcibly felt when we compare it with the *rifaccimento* by a Mrs. Pye, in Evans's Old Ballads.

failed to subdue the immortalized patience of Griselda; and such was our "Childe Waters," who put to such trials of passion, physical and mental, the maiden almost a mother. In the fourteenth century, — one century later than the histories of the "Châtelaine" and the "Dame," — either the female character was sometimes utterly dissolute, or the tyranny of husbands utterly reckless, when we find that it was no uncommon circumstance, that women were strangled by masked assassins, or, walking by the river-side, were plunged into it. This drowning of women gave rise to a popular proverb: "It is nothing, — only a woman being drowned!" La Fontaine, probably without being aware of this allusion to a practice of the fourteenth century, has preserved the proverbial phrase in his "La Femme noyée," beginning, —.

"Je ne suis pas de ceux qui disent ce n'est rien,
C'est une Femme qui se noye!" *

The personages and the manners here imperfectly sketched constituted the domestic life of our chivalric society from the twelfth century to the first civil wars of England. In this long interval, few could read; even bishops could not always write; and the Gothic baron pleaded the privilege of a layman for not doing the one nor the other.

The intellectual character of the nation can only be traced

* Montaigne was so well acquainted with this practice, that he has used it as a familiar illustration of the obstinacy of some women, which, I suppose, the good man imagined could not be paralleled by instances from the masculine sex. However, his language must not be disguised by a modern version: "Celui qui forgea le conte de la femme qui, pour aucune correction de ménaces et bastonnades, ne cessait d'appeler son mari, Pouilleux, et qui, précipité dans l'eau, haussoit encore, en s'étouffant, les mains et faisoit au-dessus de sa tête signe de tuer des poux, forgea un conte duquel en vérité tous les jours on voit l'image expresse de l'opiniâtreté des femmes."

The punishment of our "ducking-stool" for female brawlers possibly originated in this mediæval practice of throwing women into the river; but this is but an innocuous baptism, while we find the obstinate wife here, who probably spoke true enough, *s'étouffant*, — merely for correcting the filthy lubbard, her lord and master.

in the wandering minstrel and the haughty ecclesiastic. The minstrel, mingling with all the classes of society, reflected all their sympathies, and, in reality, was one of the people themselves; but the ecclesiastic stood apart, too sacred to be touched, while his very language was not that either of the noble or of the people.

A dense superstition overshadowed the land from the time of the first crusade to the last. It may be doubtful whether there was a single Christian in all Christendom; for a new sort of idolatry was introduced in shrines and relics and masses, holy wells, awful exorcisms, saintly vigils, month's minds, pilgrimages afar and penances at home, lamp-lighting before shrines decked with golden images, and hung with votive arms and legs of cripples who recovered from their rheumatic ails. The enthusiasm for the figure of the cross conferred a less pure sanctity on that memorial of pious tribulation. Everywhere it was placed before them. The crusader wore that sign on his right shoulder; and, when his image lay extended on his tomb, the crossed legs were reverently contemplated. They made the sign of the cross, by the motion of their hand, in peril or in pleasure, in sorrow and in sin; and expected no happy issue in an adventure, without frequently signing themselves with the cross. The cross was placed at the beginning and at the end of their writings and inscriptions, and it opened and closed the alphabet. The mystical virtues of the cross were the incessant theme of the monachal orders, and it was kissed in rapture on the venal indulgence expedited by the papal hierophant. As, even in sacred things, novelty and fashion will perversely put in their claim, we find the writers and sculptors varying the appearance of the cross: its simple form ✠ became enclosed in a circle ⊕, and again varied by dots ⁘ * The guardian cross protected a locality; and in England, at the origin of parishes,

* Leland's "Itinerary," ii. 126.

the cross stood as the hallowed witness which marked the boundaries, and which it had been sacrilege to disturb. It was no unusual practice to place the sign at the head of private letters, however trivial the contents, as we find it in charters and other public documents. In one of the Paston Letters, the piety of the writer, at a much later period, could not detail the ordinary occurrences of the week without inserting the sacred letters I.H.S.; and similar invocations are found in others.*

The material symbol of Christianity had thus been indiscriminately adopted, without conveying with it the virtues of the gospel. The cross was a myth; the cross was the *Fetish* † of an idolatrous Christianity: they bowed before it, they knelt to it, they kissed it, they kissed a palpable and and visible deity. Never was the Divinity rendered more familiar to the gross understandings of the vulgar; and, in these ages of unchristian Christianity, the cross was degraded even to a vulgar mark, which conveniently served for the signature of some unlettered baron.

* Paston's "Letters," v. 17.

† See the very curious chapter on the "Fetish Worship," in that very original and learned work, "The Doctor," v. 133.

GOTHIC ROMANCES.

A NEW species of literature arose in the progress of that practical education which society had assumed, — a literature addressed to the passions which rose out of the circumstances of the times; dedicated to war, to love, and to religion, when the business of life seemed restricted to the extreme indulgence of those ennobling pursuits. In too much love, too much war, too much devotion, it was not imagined that knights and ladies could ever err. If sometimes the loves were utterly licentious, wondrous tales are told of their immaculate purity. If their religion were then darkened by the grossest superstition, their faith was genuine, and would have endured martyrdom; and, if the chivalric valor often exulted in its ferocity and its rapacity, its generous honor amid a lawless state of society maintained justice in the land, by the lance which struck the oppressor, and by the shield which covered the helpless.

Every thing had assumed a more extended form; the pageantry of society had varied and multiplied; the banquet was prolonged; the festival-day was frequent; the ballad narrative or the spontaneous lyric, which had sufficed their ruder ancestors to allure attention, now demanded more volume and more variety; the Romance with a deeper interest was to revolve in the entangling narrative of many thousand lines. There was a traditional store, a stock of fabling in hand, heroical panegyrics, satirical songs, and legendary ballads: all served as the stuff for the looms of mightier weavers of rhyme,

whose predecessors had left them this inheritance. The marvellous of Romance burst forth; and this stupendous fabric of invention bewitched Europe during three centuries.

ROMANCE, from the light fabliau to the voluminous fiction, has admitted, in the luxury of our knowledge and curiosity, not only of critical investigation, but of its invention, by tracing it to a single source. The origin of Romance has been made to hinge on a theoretical history; and by maintaining exclusive systems, mostly fanciful and partly true, it has been made complicate. Whether invention, in the form of ROMANCE, came from the Oriental tale-teller or the Scandinavian scald, or whether the fictions of Europe be the growth of the Provençal or the Armorican soil, our learned inquirers have each told; nor have they failed in considerably diminishing the claims of each particular system opposed to their own. But the greatest error will be found in their mutual refutations.* While each stood intrenched in an exclusive system, they were only furnishing an integral portion of a boundless and complicate inquiry. They scrutinized with microscopic eyes into that vast fabric of invention, which the Gothic genius may proudly oppose to the fictions of antiquity; and they seemed at times forgetful of the vicissitudes, which, at distant intervals and by novel circumstances, enlarged and modified the changeful state of romantic fiction among every people.

In the attempt to retrace the Nile of Romance to a solitary source, in the eagerness of their discoveries they had not yet ascertained that this Nile bears many far-divided heads, and some from which Time shall never remove its clouds; for who dares assign an origin to the ancient Milesian tales, — the tales and their origin being alike lost? †

* Warton and Percy, Ritson and Leyden, Ellis and Turner and Price, and recently the late Abbé de la Rue.

† A profound and poetic genius has thrown out a new suggestion on the origin of these Eastern tales. "I think it not unlikely that the 'Milesian

Warton, encumbered by his theory of an Eastern origin, opened the map to track the voyage of an Arabian tale. He landed it at Marseilles, — that port by which ancient Greece first held its intercourse with our Europe; and thence the tale was sent forwards through genial Italy, but forced to harbor in this voyage of Romance at the distant shores of Brittany, that land of Romance and of the ancient Briton. The result of his system startled the literary world by his assumption, that "the British history" of Geoffry of Monmouth entirely consists of Arabian inventions, — the real source of the airy existence of our British Arthur! Bishop Percy had been nearly as adventurous in his Gothic origin, by landing a number of the Northern bards with the army of Rollo in Normandy; an event which contributed to infuse the scaldic genius into the Romances of chivalry, whose national hero is Charlemagne, — the tutelary genius of France and Germany.

They had looked to the East and to the North; and, wherever they looked for the origin of Romance, it was found. They had sought in a corner of the universe for that which is universal.

ROMANCE sprang to birth in every clime, native wherever she is found, notwithstanding that she has been a wanderer among all lands, and as prodigal a dispenser as she has been free in her borrowings and artful in her concealments.

The art of fabling may be classed among the mimetic arts. It is an aptitude of the universal and plastic faculties of our nature; and man might not be ill defined and charactered as "a mimetic and fabling animal."

Tales' contained the germs of many of those *now in the* 'Arabian Nights.' The Greek Empire must have left deep impressions on the Persian intellect: so also many of the Roman-Catholic *legends* are taken from *Apuleius*. The exquisite story of Cupid and Psyche is evidently a philosophical attempt to parry Christianity with a quasi Platonic account of the fall and redemption of man." — *Coleridge's Literary Remains*, i. 180. Whatever were these "Milesian Tales," they amused the Grecian sages in the earliest period of their history.

The earliest Romances appear in a metrical form about the middle of the twelfth century. The first were "Estoires," or pretended chronicles, like that of the Brut of Wace. The Romances of martial achievement then predominated, — those of the Knights of Arthur, and the Paladins of Charlemagne: the adventures of love and gallantry were of a later epoch. In the mutability of taste, an extraordinary transition occurred: after nearly two centuries passed in rhyming, all the verse was to be turned into prose. Whether voluminous rhymes satiate the public ear, or novelty in the form was sought even when they had but little choice, the writers of Romance, a very flexible gentry, who, of all other writers, servilely accommodate themselves to the public taste, with more fluent pens loitered into a more ample page; or, as they expressed themselves, *translatés de rime en prose*, or *mis en beau langage*. Many of the old French metrical Romances, in the fourteenth century, were disguised in this humbled form; but their *mensogne magnanime*, to use Tasso's style, who loved them, lost nothing in number or in hardihood. On the discovery of the typographic art, in the fifteenth century, many of these prose Romances in manuscript received a new life by passing through the press; and these, in their venerable *lettres Gothiques*, are still hoarded for the solace of the curious in fictions of genuine antiquity, and of invention in its prime, both at home and abroad; and, in a reduced form, we find them surviving among the people on the Continent. It is singular that the metrical Romances seem never to have received the honors conferred on the prose.*

These Romances, in their manuscript state, were cherished objects.† The mighty tomes, sometimes consisting of forty or

* Ritson and Weber have elegantly printed some of the best English metrical romances. In France they have recently enriched literature with many of these manuscript romances. — See "Gentleman's Magazine," October, 1839.

† It is a curious fact, that, in 1390, Sir James Douglas, of Dalkeith, the ancestor of the Earl of Morton, apparently valued them as about equal to

fifty thousand lines, described as those "great books of parchment" or "the great book of Romances," were usually embellished by the pen and the pencil with every ornament that fancy could suggest; bound in crimson velvet, guarded by clasps of silver, and studded with golden roses; profuse of gorgeous illuminations, and decorated with the most delicate miniatures, "limned with gold of graver's work" on an azure ground; or the purple page setting off the silvery letters, — objects then of perpetual attraction to the story-believing reader, and which now charm the eye which could not as patiently con the endless page. The fashions of the times are exactly shown in the dresses and the domestic furniture; as well as their instruments, military and musical.

Studies for the artist, as for the curious antiquary,* we may view the plumage in a casque curved and falling with peculiar grace, and a lady's robe floating in its amplitude; and ornaments of dress arranged, which our taste might emulate. A French amateur, who possessed "Le Roman de la Violette," a Romance of a fabulous Count of Nevers, was so deeply struck by its exquisite and faithful miniatures, that he employed the best artists to copy the most interesting, and placed them in his collection of the costume and fashions of the French nation, — a collection preserved in the Royal Library of France.† If their hard outline does not always flow into grace, their imagination worked under the mysterious influence of the Romance through all their devoted labor. In a group of figures, we may observe that the heads are not me-

the statutes of the realm; for he bequeathed in his will to his son, "omnes libros meos tam *Statutorum* Regni Scocie quam *Romancie*." — *Laing's Early Metrical Tales*, Edinburgh, 1826.

* A collection of these romances, formed into three folio tomes in manuscript, was enriched by seven hundred and forty-seven miniatures, *avec les Initiales peintes en or et couleurs*. 6093, Roxburgh Cat.

† Cat. of the Duke de la Vallière, 4507. Strutt would have done as much for ourselves; but he worked in unrequited solitude, with all the passion of the French amateur, but without his "best artists."

chanically cast by one mould; but the distinct character looks as if the thoughtful artist had worked out his recollections on which he had meditated. In some of the heads, portraits of distinguished persons have been recognized. Not less observable are the arabesques often found on the margins, where the playful pencil has prodigally flung flowers and fruit, imitating the bloom, or insects which look as if they had lighted on the leaf. These margins, however, occasionally exhibit arabesques of a very different character; figures or subjects which often amused the pencil of the monastic limners, satirical strokes aimed at their brothers and sisters, — the monks and the nuns. I have observed a wolf, in a monk's frock and cowl, stretching its paw to bless a cock bending its submissive head; a cat, in the habit of an abbess, holding a platter in its paws to a mouse approaching to lick it, — alluding to the allurements of abbesses to draw young women into the convents; and a sow, in a nun's veil, mounted on stilts. A pope appears to be thrown by devils into a caldron, and cardinals are roasting on spits. All these expressions of suppressed opinion must have been executed by the monks themselves. These reformers before the Reformation sympathized with the popular feeling against the haughty prelate and the luxurious abbot.

The great Romance of Alexander, preserved in the Bodleian Library, reveals a secret of the cost of time freely bestowed on that single and mighty tome. The illuminator, by preserving the date when he had completed his own work compared with that of the transcriber when he had finished his part, appears to have employed nearly six years on the paintings which embellish this precious volume.*

Such a metrical Romance was a gift presented to royalty,

* This romance was composed about the year 1200. The present copy was made in 1338. There is also a splendid manuscript, with rich and delicate illuminations of the ancient romance of Alexander in prose, in the Brit. Mus., Bib. Reg. 15, E. 6.

when engrossed by the rapturous hand of the Romancer himself. The autograph, in a presentation-copy, might count on the meed of "massy goblets" when the munificent patron found the new volume delectable to his taste; which indeed had been anticipated by the writer. This incident occurred to Froissart in presenting his Romance to Richard the Second; when, in reply to his majesty's inquiry after the contents, the author exultingly told that "the book treated of Amour."

To the writers of these ancient Romances we cannot deny a copious invention, a variegated imagination, and, among their rambling exuberances and their grotesque marvels, those enchanting enchantments which the Greeks and Romans only partially and coldly raised. We may often, too, discover that truth of human nature which is not always supposed to lie hid in these desultory compositions. Amid their peculiar extravagances, which at least may serve to raise an occasional smile, the strokes of nature are abundant, and may still form the studies of the writers of fiction, however they may hang on the impatience of the writers and the readers of our duodecimos. Ancient writers are pictorial: their very fault contributes to produce a remarkable effect, — a fulness often overflowing, but which at least is not a scantiness leaving the vagueness of imperfect description. Their details are more circumstantial, their impressions are more vivid, and they often tell their story with the earnestness of persons who had conversed with the actors, or had been spectators of the scene. We may be wearied, as one might be at a protracted trial by the witnesses; but we are often struck by an energetic reality which we sometimes miss in their polished successors. Their copiousness, indeed, is without selection: they wrote before they were critics; but their truth is not the less truth because it is given with little art.

The dilations of the metrical Romances into tomes of prose, Warton considered as a proof of the decay of invention. Was not this censure rather the feeling of a poet for his art,

than the decision of a critic? — for the more extended scenes of the Romances in prose required a wider stage, admitted of a fuller dramatic effect in the incidents, and a more perfect delineation of the personages through a more sustained action. If the prose Romances are not epics by the conventional code of the Stagirite, at least they are epical; and some rude Homers sleep among these old Romancers, metrical or prosaic. A living poetic critic, one best skilled to arbitrate, — for he is without any prepossessions in favor of our ancient writers, — has honestly acknowledged their faithfulness to nature in their touching simplicity. "Nor," he adds, "do they less afford, by their bolder imagination, adequate subjects for the historical pencil." And he has more particularly noticed "Le bone Florence de Rome;" thus written by our ungrammatical minstrels. "Classical poetry has scarcely ever conveyed in shorter boundaries so many interesting and complicated events as may be found in this good old Romance." * This indeed is so true, that we find these romantic tales were not only recited or read, but their subjects were worked into the tapestries which covered the walls of their apartments. The Bible and the Romance equally offered subjects, to eyes learned in the "Estoires," never to be forgotten.

Our master-poets have drawn their waters from these ancient fountains. SIDNEY might have been himself one of their heroes, and was no unworthy rival of his masters. SPENSER borrowed largely, and repaid with munificence. MILTON, in his loftiest theme, looked down with admiration on this terrestrial race, —

> "And what resounds
> In fable or romance of Uther's son,
> Begirt with British or Armoric knights."

"In 'Amadis of Gaul,'" has said our true laureate, "may be found the Zelmane of the 'Arcadia,' the Masque of Cupid of

* Campbell's "Essay on English Poetry."

the 'Faery Queen,' and the Florizel of the 'Winter's Tale.' Sidney, Spenser, and Shakspeare imitated this book: was ever book honored by three such imitators?" *

A great similarity is observable among these writers of fiction, both in their incidents and the identity of their phrases; an evidence that these inventors were often drawing from a common source. In these ages of manuscripts, they practised without scruple many artifices, and might safely appropriate the happiest passages of their anonymous brothers.† One Romance would produce many by variations; the same story would serve as the groundwork of another; and the later

* Our vernacular literature owes to the unremitting ardor of our laureate recent editions of "La Morte d'Arthur," "Palmerin of England," and a new translation from the Portuguese of "Amadis of Gaul." For readers who are not antiquaries, and who may recoil from the prolixity of the ancient romances, there is a work of their species which may amply gratify their curiosity, and it is of easy acquisition. It is not an unskilful compilation from the romances of chivalry, made by RICHARD JOHNSON, a noted bookwright in the reign of Elizabeth. It has passed through innumerable editions, and has at last taken its station in the popular library of our juvenile literature. I suspect that the style has been too often altered in the modern editions, which has injured its raciness. It is well known as "the Renowned History of the Seven Champions of Christendom." The compiler has metamorphosed the Rowland, Oliver, Guy, Bevis, &c., into seven saints or champions of Christendom; but "he has preserved some of the most capital fictions of the old Arabian romance." — *Warton*, iii. 63, ed. 8vo. It may serve as a substitute for the old black-letter romances, being a compendium of their rich or their grotesque fancies; or, as Ritson observes with his accustomed energetical criticism, "it is a compound of superstition, and, as it were, all the lyes in Christendom in one lye, and is in many parts of the country believed at this day to be as true as the gospel." — *Dissertation on Romance*, xxxiv.

† One of the most celebrated romantic histories is "the Troy-book of Guido delle Colonne," which has been considered as the original of all the later tales of Troy. On the acute suggestion of Tyrwhit, Douce ascertained that this fabulous history, by many regarded as original, is only a Latin translation of a Norman poet,[1] which Guido passes off as a history collected from Dares and other fictitious authorities, but disingenuously conceals the name of Benoit de Saint Maur, whose works he appears to have found when

[1] Douce's "Illustrations of Shakspeare."

Romancer, to set at rest the scruples of the reader, usually found fault with his predecessors, who, having written the same story, had not given "the true one." By this innocent imposture, or this ingenious impudence, they designed to confer on their Romance the dignity of history. The metrical Romances pretend to translate some ancient "Cronik" which might be consulted at Caerleon, the magical palace of the vanished Arthur; or they give their own original Romance as from some "Latyn auctour," whose name is cautiously withheld; or they practise other devices, pretending to have drawn their work from "the Greek" or "the English," and even from an "unknown language." In some colophons of the prose Romances, the names of real persons are assigned as the writers;* but the same Romance is equally ascribed to different persons, and works are given as translations which in fact are originals. Amid this prevailing confusion and these contradictory statements, we must agree with the editor of Warton, that we cannot with any confidence name the author of any of these prose Romances. RITSON has aptly treated these pseudonymous translators as "men of straw." We may say of them all as the antiquary DOUCE, in the agony of his baffled researches after one of their favorite authorities, a will o' the wisp named Lollius, exclaimed, somewhat gravely, "Of Lollius it will become every one to speak with diffidence." Ariosto seems to have caught this bantering humor of mystifying his readers in his own Gothic Romance,

he came to England. It was a prevalent practice in the middle ages to appropriate a work by a cautious suppression of any mention of the original. Tiraboschi might now be satisfied that Guido delle Colonne was in England, which he doubted; since he now stands charged with only turning into Latin prose the poem of a Norman; that is, an English poet at the court of our Henry the Second.

* In the curious catalogue of these romances in the Roxburgh Library, the cataloguer announced three or four of these pretended authors as "names unknown to any literary historians," and considered the announcement a literary discovery.

gravely referring his extravagances to "the chronicle of the pseudo Archbishop Turpin" for his voucher! What was with the Italian but a playful stroke of satire on the pretended verity of Turpin himself, may have covered a more serious design with these ancient Romance-writers. Père Menestrier ascribed these productions to heralds, who, he says, were always selected for their talents, their knowledge, and their experience; qualifications not the most essential for Romance-writing. "According to the bad taste of those ignorant ages," he proceeds, "it is from them so many Romances on feats of arms and on chivalry issued, by which they designed to elevate their own office, and to celebrate their voyages in different lands." * St. Palaye, in adopting this notion of these heraldical Romancers, with more knowledge of the ancient Romancers than the good father possessed, has added a more numerous body (the *Trouvères*), who, either in rehearsing or in composing these poetical narratives, might urge a stronger claim.

When Père Menestrier imagined that it was the intention of these heralds, by these Romances, "to celebrate their voyages in different lands," it seems to have escaped him that "the voyages" of these Romancers to the visionary Caerleon, to England, or to Macedonia, were but a geography of Fairy-land.

In the history of literature, we here discover a whole generation of writers, who, so far from claiming the honor of their inventions, or aspiring after the meed of fame, have even studiedly concealed their claims, and, with a modesty and caution difficult to comprehend, dropped into their graves without a solitary commemoration.

These idling works of idlers must have been the pleasant productions of persons of great leisure, with some tincture of literature, and to whom, by the peculiarity of their condition,

* Père Menestrier, "Chevalerie, Ancienne et Moderne," chap. 5. On HERALDS.

fame was an absolute nullity. Who were these writers who thus contemned fame? Who pursued the delicate tasks of the illuminator and the calligrapher? Who adorned Psalters with a religious patience, and expended a whole month in contriving the vignette of an initial letter? Who were these artists who worked for no gain? In those ages, the ecclesiastics were the only persons who answer to this character; and it would only be in the silence and leisure of the monastery that such imaginative genius and such refined art could find their dwelling-place. I have sometimes thought that it was Père Hardouin's conviction of all this literary industry of the monks which led him to indulge his extravagant conjecture, that the classical writings of antiquity were the fabrications of this sedentary brotherhood; and his "pseudo-Virgilius" and "pseudo-Horatius" astonished the world, though they provoked its laughter.

The Gothic mediæval periods were ages of imagination, when, in art, works of amazing magnitude were produced, while the artists sent down no claims to posterity. We know not who were the numerous writers of these voluminous Romances; but, what is far more surprising, we are nearly as unacquainted with those great and original architects who covered our land with the palatial monastery, the church, and the cathedral. In the religious societies themselves, the genius of the Gothic architect was found: the bishop or the abbot planned while they opened their treasury, and the sculptor and the workmen were the tenants of the religious house. The devotion of labor and of faith raised these wonders, while it placed them beyond the unvalued glory which the world can give.*

We cannot think less than Père Hardouin, that there were no poetical and imaginative monks — Homers in cowls, and Virgils who chanted vespers — who could compose in their

* See Bentham's "History and Antiquities of Ely," 27.

unoccupied day more beautiful Romances than their crude legends or the dry annals of the leiger-book of their abbey. Some knowledge these writers had of the mythological, and even the Homeric and Virgilian fictions; for they often gave duplicates of the classical fables of antiquity. Circe was a fair sorceress, the one-eyed Polyphemus a dread giant, and Perseus bestrode a winged dragon, before they were reflected in Romances. But what we discover peculiar in these works is a strange mixture of sacred and profane matters, always treated in a manner which scents of the cloister. Before he enters the combat, the knight is often on his knees, invoking his patron-saint; he proffers his vows on holy relics; while ladies placed in the last peril or the most delicate positions, by their fervent repetitions of the sign of the cross or a vow to found an abbey, are as certainly saved: and, for another refined stroke of the monachal invention, the heroes often close their career in a monastery or a hermitage. The monkish morality which sat loosely about them, was, however, rigid in its ceremonial discipline. Lancelot de Lac leaves the bed of the guilty Genevra, the queen of the good King Arthur, at the ring of the matin-bell, to assist at mass: so scrupulous were such writers, that, even in criminal levities, they should not neglect all the offices of the Church. The subject of one of these great Romances is a search after the cup which held the real blood of Christ; and this history of the *Sang-real* forms a series of Romances. Who but a monk would have thought, and even dared to have written it down, that all the circumstances in this Romance were not only certain, but were originally set down by the hand of Jesus himself? — and further dared to observe, that Jesus never wrote but twice before, — the Lord's Prayer, and the sentence on the woman taken in adultery. Such a pious or blasphemous fraud was not unusual among the dark fancies of the monastic legendaries.

Some of these Homers must have left their lengthening "Iliad," as Homer himself seems to have done, unfinished;

tired, or tiring; for no doubt there was often a rehearsal: "the tale half told" was resumed by some Elisha who caught the mantle his more inspired predecessor had let fall. It appears evident that several were the continuators of a favorite Romance; and, from deficient attention or deficient skill, a fatal discrepancy has been detected in the identical characters, — the ordinary fate of those who write after the ideas of another, with indistinct conceptions, or with fancies going contrary to those of the first inventor.

These metrical Romances in manuscript, and the printed prose in their original editions, are now very costly. By the antiquary and the poet, these tomes may be often opened. With the antiquary, they have served as the veritable registers of their ages. The French antiquaries, and Carte in England, have often illustrated by those ancient Romances many obscure points in geography and history. Except in the mere machinery of their fancy, these writers had no motive to pervert leading facts; for these served to give a color of authenticity to their pretended history, or to fix their locality. As they had not the erudition to display, nor were aware of the propriety of copying, the customs and manners of the age of their legendary hero, they have faithfully transmitted their own. We should never have had, but for this lucky absurdity, the "Tale of Thebes" turned into a story of the middle ages; while Alexander the Great is but the ideal of a Norman baron in the splendor and altitude of the conception of the writers. It was the ignorance of the illuminators of our Latin and Saxon manuscripts of any other country than their own which enabled STRUTT to place before the eye a pictorial exhibition of our Anglo-Saxon fathers. Compared with the realities of these originals, with all their faults of tediousness, the modern copiers of ancient times, in their mock-scenes of other ages, too often reflect in the cold moonlight of their fancy a shadowy, unsubstantial antiquity.

The influence of these fabulous achievements of unconquerable heroes and of self-devoted lovers over the intellect and the passions of men and women, during that vast interval of time when they formed the sole literature, was omnipotent. In the early Romances of chivalry, when their genius was purely military, and directed to kindle a passion for joining the crusades, we rarely find adventures of the tender passion; but since women cannot endure neglect, and the female character has all the pliancy of sympathy, and has performed her part in every age on the theatre of society, we discover the extraordinary fact, that many ladies assumed the plumy helmet, and dexterously managed the lance. The ladies rode amid armed knights, resistless as themselves. It was subsequently, when we find that singularly fantastic institution of "the Courts of Love," which delivered their "Arrets" in the style of a most refined jurisprudence, that these beautiful companions-at-arms were satisfied to conquer the conquerors by more legitimate seductions, and that the Romances told of little but of loves. Ariosto and Tasso are supposed to have drawn their female warriors from the Amazonian Penthesilea and the Camilla of Homer and Virgil; but it would seem that the prototype of these feminine knights these poets also found among those old Romances which they loved.

It is unquestionable that these martial Romances of chivalry inflamed the restlessness of those numerous military adventurers who found an ample field for their chivalry after the crusades, in our continued incursions into France, of which country we were long a living plague, from the reign of Edward III. to that of Henry V., nearly a century of national tribulation. Many "a gentyl and noble esquyer," if perchance the English monarch held a truce with France or Scotland, flew into some foreign service. Sir Robert Knolles was known to the French as *le véritable démon de la guerre;* and Sir John Hawkwood, when there was no fighting to be got at home, passed over into Italy, where he approved him-

self to be such a prodigy of "a man-at-arms," that the grateful Florentines raised his statue in their cathedral: this image of English valor may still be proudly viewed. This chivalric race of Romance-readers were not, however, always of the purest "order of chivalry." If they were eager for enterprise, they were not less for its more prudential results. A castle or a ransom in France, a lordly marriage, or a domain in Italy, were the lees that lie at the bottom of their glory.

We continued long in this mixed state of glory clouded with barbarism; for, at a time when literature and the fine arts were on the point of breaking out into the splendor of the pontificate of Leo the Tenth, in our own country the great Duke of Buckingham, about 1500, held the old Romance of "the Knight of the Swan" in the highest estimation, because the translator maintained that our duke was lineally descended from that hero. The first peer of the realm was proud of deriving his pedigree from a fabulous knight in a romantic genealogy.

But all the inventions and fashions of man have their date and their termination. For three centuries, these ancient Romances, metrical or prose, had formed the reading of the few who read, and entranced the circle of eager listeners. The enchantment was on the wane; their admirers had become somewhat sceptical of "the true history" which had been so solemnly warranted: another taste in the more chastened writings of Roman and Grecian lore was now on the ascendant. One last effort was made in this decline of romantic literature, in that tessellated compilement where the mottled pieces drawn out of the French prose Romances of chivalry were finely squared together by no unskilful workman, in Sir THOMAS MALORY, to the English lover of ancient Romance well known by the title of "La Morte d'Arthur." This last of these ancient Romances was finished in the ninth year of the reign of Edward IV., about 1470. CAX-

TON exulted to print this epical Romance; and, at the same time, he had the satisfaction of reproaching the "laggard" age. "What do ye now," exclaimed the ancient printer, "but go to the *Bagnes*, and play at dice? Leave this, leave it, and read these noble volumes!"—volumes which not many years after, when a new system of affairs had occurred to supplant this long-idolized "order of chivalry," ROGER ASCHAM plainly asserted, only taught "open manslaughter and bold bawdry." Such was the final fate of Love and Arms!

ORIGIN OF THE VERNACULAR LANGUAGES OF EUROPE.

THE predominance of the Latin language, during many centuries, retarded the cultivation of the vernacular dialects of Europe. When the barbarous nations had triumphed over ancient Rome, the language of the Latins remained unconquered: that language had diffused itself with the universal dominion, and, living in the minds of men, required neither legions nor consuls to maintain its predominance.

From accident, and even from necessity, the swarming hordes, some of whom seem to have spoken a language which had never been written, and were a roving people at a period prior to historical record, had adopted that single colloquial idiom which their masters had conveyed to them, attracted, if not by its beauty, at least by its convenience. This vulgar Latin was not, indeed, the Latin of the great writers of antiquity; but in its corrupt state, freed from a complex construction, and even from grammar, had more easily lent itself to the jargon of the ruder people. Teutonic terms, or Celtic words with corrupt Latinisms, were called "the scum of ancient eloquence, and the rust of vulgar barbarisms," by an indignant critic in the middle of the fifth century.* It was amid this confusion of races, of idioms, and of customs, that from this heterogeneous mass were hewed out those VERNACULAR DIALECTS of Europe which furnished each people

* Sidonius Apollinaris.

with their own idiom, and which are now distinguished as the MODERN LANGUAGES.

In this transference and transfusion of languages, Italy retained the sonorous termination of her paternal soil, and Spain did not forget the majesty of the Latin accent, — lands favored by more genial skies, and men blessed with more flexible organs. But the Gothic and the Northern races barbarously abbreviated or disfigured their Latin words: to sounds so new to them they gave their own rude inflections. There is but one organ to regulate the delicacy of orthoepy, — a musical and a tutored ear. The Gaul,* in cutting his words down, contracted a nasal sharpness; and the Northmen, in the shock of their hard, redundant consonants, lost the vowelly confluence.

This vulgar or corrupt Latin, mingled with this diversity of jargons, was the vitiated mother of the sister-languages of Europe, — sisters still bearing their family likeness, of the same homely origin, but of various fortunes, till some attained to the beauty and affluence of their Latin line. From the first, the people themselves had dignified their spurious generation of language as *Romans*, or *Romance*, or *Romaunt*, still proud, perhaps, of its Roman source; but the critical Latins themselves had distinguished it as *Rustic*, to indicate a base dialect used only by those who were far removed from the metropolis of the world.

* An ingenious literary antiquary has given us a copious vocabulary, as complete evidence of Latin words merely abbreviated by omitting their terminations, whence originated those numerous monosyllables which impoverish the French language. In the following instances, the Gauls only used the first syllable for the entire word, — damnum, *damn;* aureum, *or;* malum, *mal;* nudum, *nud;* amicus, *ami;* vinum, *vin;* homo, *hom*, as anciently written; curtus, *court;* sonus, *son;* bonus, *bon*, — and thus made many others.

The nasal sound of our neighbors still prevails: thus Gracchus sinks into *Gracque;* Titus Livius is but *Tite Live;* and the historian of Alexander the Great, the dignified Quintus Curtius, is the ludicrous *Quinte Curce!* — AUGUIS: *Du Génie de la Langue Françoise.*

But, when these different nations had established their separate independence, this vernacular idiom was wholly left to the people: it was the image of their own barbaric condition, unworthy of the studies, and inadequate to the genius, of any writer. The universal language maintained its pre-eminence over the particular dialect; and, as the course of human events succeeded in the overwhelming of ancient Rome, another Rome shadowed the world. Ecclesiastical Rome, whence the novel faith of Christianity was now to emanate, far more potent than military Rome, perpetuated the ancient language. The clergy, through the diversified realms of Europe, were held together in strict conformity, and by a common bond chained to the throne of the priesthood, — one faith, one discipline, one language!

The Latin tongue, both in verse and prose, was domiciliated among people of the most opposite interests, customs, and characters. The primitive fathers, the later schoolmen, the monkish chroniclers, all alike composed in Latin; all legal instruments, even marriage-contracts, were drawn in Latin; and even the language of Christian prayer was that of abolished paganism.

The idiom of their father-land, — or, as we have affectionately called it, our "mother-tongue," and, as our ancient translator of the "Polychronicon" energetically terms it, "the birth-tongue," — those first human accents which their infant ear had caught, and which from their boyhood were associated with the most tender and joyous recollections, every nation left to fluctuate on the lips of the populace, rude and neglected. Whenever a writer, proposing to inform the people on subjects which more nearly interested them, composed in the national idiom, it was a strong impulse only which could induce him thus to submit to degrade his genius. One of the French crusaders, a learned knight, was anxious that the nation should become acquainted with the great achievements of the deliverers of Jerusalem. It was the command of his

bishop that induced him to compose the narrative in the vernacular idiom: but the twelve years which he bestowed on his chronicle were not considered by him as employed for his glory; for he avows that the humiliating style which he had used was the mortifying performance of a religious penance.

All who looked towards advancement in worldly affairs, and were of the higher orders in society, cultivated the language of Rome. It is owing to this circumstance, observes a learned historian of our country, that "the Latin language and the classical writers were preserved by the Christian clergy from that destruction which has entirely swept from us the language and the writings of Phœnicia, Carthage, Babylon, and Egypt."* We must also recollect that the influence of the Latin language became far more permanent when the great master-works of antiquity were gradually unburied from their concealments. In this resurrection of taste and genius, they derived their immortality from the imperishable soul of their composition. All Europe was condemned to be copiers, or in despair to be plagiarists.

It is well known how the admirable literatures of Greece and Rome struck a fresh impulse into literary pursuits at that period which has been distinguished as the restoration of letters. The emigration of the fugitive Greeks conveyed the lost treasures of their more ancient literature to the friendly shores of Italy. Italy had then to learn a new language, and to borrow inspiration from another genius.

The occupation of disinterring manuscripts which had long been buried in dungeon-darkness was carried on with an enthusiasm of which perhaps it would be difficult for us, at this day, to form an adequate conception. Many exhausted their fortunes in remote journeys, or in importations from the East; and the possession of a manuscript was considered not to have been too dearly purchased by the transfer of an estate,

* Turner's "History of England."

since only for the loan of one the pledge was nothing less.* The discovery of an author, perhaps heard of for the first time, was tantamount to the acquisition of a province; and, when a complete copy of "Quintilian" was discovered, the news circulated throughout Europe. The rapture of collation, the restoration of a corrupt text, or the perpetual commentary, became the ambition of a life, even after the era of printing.

This was the useful age of critical erudition. It furnished the studious with honors and avocations; but they were reserved only for themselves: it withdrew them from the cultivation of all vernacular literature. They courted not the popular voice when a professorial chair or a dignified secretaryship offered the only profit or honor the literary man contemplated. Accustomed to the finished compositions of the ancients, the scholar turned away from the rudeness of the maternal language. There was no other public opinion than what was gathered from the writings of the few who wrote to the few who read. They transcribed as sacred what authority had long established. Their arguments were scholastic and metaphysical; for they held little other communication with the world, or among themselves, but through the restricted medium of their writings. This state was a heritage of ideas and of opinions, transmitted from age to age with little addition or diminution. Authority and quotation closed all argument, and filled vast volumes. University responded to university, and men of genius were following each other in the sheep-tracks of antiquity. Even to so late a period as the days of Erasmus, every Latin word was culled with a classical superstition, and a week of agony was exhausted on a page finely inlaid with a mosaic of phrases.† While this verbal generation flourished, some eminent scho-

* See "Curiosities of Literature," article Recovery of Manuscripts.

† Erasmus composed a satirical dialogue between two vindictive Ciceronians. It is said that a duel has been occasioned by the intrepidity of maintaining the purity of a writer's Latinity. The pedantry of mixing

lars were but ridiculous apes of Cicero, and, in a cento of verses, empty echoes of Virgil. All native vigor died away in the coldness of imitation; and a similarity of thinking and of style deprived the writers of that raciness which the nations of Europe subsequently displayed when they cultivated their vernacular literature.

It is remarkable of those writers who had already distinguished themselves by their Latin works, that, when they began to compose in their native language, those classical effusions, on which they had confidently rested their future celebrity, sank into oblivion; and the writers themselves ceased to be subjects either of critical inquiry or of popular curiosity, except in that language in which they had opened a vein of original thought, in a manner and diction the creation of their own feelings. Here their natural power and their freed faculties placed them at a secure interval from their imitators. Modern writers in Latin were doomed to find too many academical equals; but those who were inimitable in their vernacular idiom could dread no rival, and discovered how the productions of the heart, rather than those of the lexicon, were echoed to their authors in the voice of their contemporaries.

The people indeed were removed far out of the influence of literature. The people could neither become intelligent with the knowledge, nor sympathize with the emotions, concealed in an idiom which had long ceased to be spoken, and which exacted all the labor and the leisure of the cloistered student.

This state of affairs had not occurred among the Greeks, and hardly among the Romans, who had only composed their immortal works in their maternal tongue: their arts, their sciences, and their literature were to be acquired by the single

Greek and Latin terms in the vernacular language is ridiculed by RABELAIS in his encounter with the Limousin student, whom he terrified till the youngster ended in delivering himself in plain French, and left off "Pindarizing" all the rest of his days. — *Pantagruel*, lib. ii. c. 6.

language which they used. It was the infelicity of their successors in dominion to weary out the tenderness of youth in the repulsive labors of acquiring the languages of the two great nations whose empire had for ever closed, but whose finer genius had triumphed over their conquerors.

With the ancients, instruction did not commence until their seventh year; and, till they had reached that period, Nature was not disturbed in her mysterious workings: the virgin intellect was not doomed to suffer the violence of our first barren studies,—that torture of learning a language which has ceased to be spoken by the medium of another equally unknown. Perhaps it was owing to this favorable circumstance, that, among the inferior classes of society in the two ancient nations, their numerous slaves displayed such an aptitude for literature, eminent as skilful scribes, and even as original writers.

One of the earliest prose-writers in our language, when style was beginning to be cultivated, has aptly described, by a domestic but ingenious image, the effect of our youth gathering the burdens of grammatical fagots in the Sylva of antiquity. It is Sir THOMAS ELYOT who speaks, in "the Boke of the Governor," printed in 1531: "By that time the learner cometh to the most sweet and pleasant rendering of old authors, the sparks of fervent desire are extinct with the burthen of grammar, like as a little fire is even quenched with a great heap of small sticks, so that it can never come to the principal logs, where it should burn in a great pleasant fire."

It was Italy, the Mother and the Nurse of Literature (as the filial zeal of her sons has hailed her), which first opened to the nations of Europe the possibility of each creating a vernacular literature, reflecting the image, not of the Greeks and of the Romans, but of themselves.

Three memorable men, of the finest and most contrasted genius, appeared in one country and at one period. With that contempt for the language of the people in which the learned participated, busied as they were at the restoration of letters

by their new studies and their progressive discoveries, PETRARCH contemned his own Italian "Rime," and was even insensible to the inspiration of a mightier genius than his own, — that genius who, with a parental affection, had adopted the orphan idiom of his fatherland, — an orphan idiom which had not yet found even a name; for it was then uncertain what was the true language of Italy. DANTE had at first proposed to write in Latin; but, with all his adoration of his master Virgil, he rejected the verse of Virgil, and anticipated the wants of future ages. A peculiar difficulty, however, occurred to the first former of the vernacular literature of Italy. In the state of this unsettled language, composed of fragments of the Latinity of a former populace, with the corruptions and novelties introduced by its new masters, deformed by a great variety of dialects, submitted in the mouths of the people to their caprices, and unstamped by the hand of a master, it seemed hopeless to fix on any idiom, which, by its inherent nobleness, should claim the distinguished honor of being deemed Italian. DANTE denied this envied grace to any of the rival principalities of his country. The poet, however, mysteriously asserted, that the true Italian *volgare* might be discovered in every Italian city; but, being common to all, it could not be appropriated by any single one. Dante dignified the *volgare illustre*, which he had conceived in his mind, by magnificent titles: it was "illustrious;" it was "cardinal;" it was "aulic;" it was "courtly;" it was the language of the most learned who had composed in the vulgar idiom, whether in Sicily, in Tuscany, in Puglia, even in Lombardy, or in the marshes of Ancona! This fanciful description of the Italian language appeared enigmatical to the methodical investigations of the cold and cautious TIRABOSCHI. That grave critic submitted the interior feeling of the poet to the test of facts and dates. With more erudition than taste, he marked the mechanical gradations, the stages of every language, from rudeness to refinement. The mere historical investigator could conceive

no other style than what his chronology had furnished; but the spirit of DANTE had penetrated beyond the palpable substances of the explorer of facts and the arranger of dates. DANTE, in his musings, had thrown a mystical veil over the Italian language; but the poet presciently contemplated, amid the distraction of so many dialects, that an Italian style would arise, which, at some distant day, would be deemed classical. DANTE wrote, and DANTE was the classic of his country.

The third great master of the vernacular literature of Italy was BOCCACCIO, who threw out the fertility of his genius in the *volgare* of Nature herself. This Shakspeare of a hundred tales transformed himself into all the conditions of society: he touched all the passions of human beings, and penetrated into the thoughts of men ere he delineated their manners. Even two learned Greeks acknowledged that the tale-teller of Certaldo, in his variegated pages, had displayed such force and diversity in his genius, that no Greek writer could be compared with his *volgare eloquenza.*

The Italian literature thus burst into birth and into maturity; while it is remarkable of the other languages of Europe, that, after their first efforts, they fell into decrepitude. Our Saxon rudeness seems to have required more hewing and polishing to be modelled into elegance, and more volubility to flow into harmony, than even the genius of its earliest writers could afford. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio were the contemporaries of Gower, of Chaucer, and of "the Ploughman;" they delight their nation after the lapse of many centuries: while the critics of the reign of Elizabeth complained that Piers Ploughman, Chaucer, and Gower then required glossaries; and so, at a later period, did Ronsard, Baif, and Marot, in France. In prose, we had no single author till the close of the sixteenth century who had yet constructed a style; and, in France, Rabelais and Montaigne had contracted the rust and the rudeness of antiquity, as it seemed to the refinement of the following generation.

It cannot be thougnt that the genius of the Italians always excelled that of other countries; but the material which those artists handled yielded more kindly to their touch. The shell they struck gave a more melodious sound than the rough and scrannel pipe cut from the Northern forests.

Custom and prejudice, however, predominated over the feelings of the learned even in Italy. Their epistolary correspondence was still carried on in Latin, and their first dramas were in the language of ancient Rome. ANGELO POLITIAN appears to have been the earliest who composed a dramatic piece, his "Orfeo," in *stilo volgare;* and for which he assigns a reason which might have occurred to many of his predecessors, — *perchè degli spettatori fusse meglio intesa,* — that he might be better understood by the audience!

The vernacular idiom in Italy was still so little in repute, while the prejudice in favor of the Latin was so firmly rooted, that their youths were prohibited from reading Italian books. A curious anecdote of the times which its author has sent down to us, however, shows that their native productions operated with a secret charm on their sympathies; for VARCHI has told the singular circumstance, that his father once sent him to prison, where he was kept on bread and water, as a penance for his inveterate passion for reading works in the vernacular tongue.

The struggle for the establishment of a vernacular literature was apparent about the same period in different countries of Europe, — a simultaneous movement to vindicate the honor and to display the merits of their national idiom.

JOACHIM DE BELLAY, of an illustrious literary family, resided three years with his relative the cardinal at Rome. The glory of the great vernacular authors of Italy inflamed his ardor; and, in one of his poems, he develops the beauty of "composing in our native language" by the deeper emotions it excites in our countrymen. Subsequently he published his "Defense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise," in 1549,

where eloquently and learnedly he would persuade his nation to write in their own language. FERREIRA, the Portuguese poet, about the same time, with all the feelings of patriotism, resolved to give birth to a national literature; exhorting his countrymen to cultivate their vernacular idiom, which he purified and enriched. He has thus feelingly expressed this glorious sentiment:—

> "Eu desta gloria so' fico contente
> Que a minha terra amei, e a minha gente."

In Scotland, we find Sir DAVID LYNDSAY, in 1553, writing his great work on "the Monarchie," in his vernacular idiom; although he thought it necessary to apologize, by alleging the example of Moses, Aristotle, Plato, Virgil, and Cicero, who had all composed their works in their own language.

In our own country, Lord BERNERS had anticipated this general movement. In 1525, when he ventured on the toil of his voluminous and spirited "Froissart," he described it as "translated out of Frenshe into our *maternal English tongue;*" an expression which indicates those filial yearnings of literary patriotism which were now to give us a native literature.

The predominant prejudice of writing in Latin was first checked in Germany, France, and England by the leaders of that great Revolution which opposed the dynasty of the tiara. It was one of the great results of the Reformation, that it taught the learned to address the people. The versions of the Scriptures seemed to consecrate the vernacular idiom of every nation in Europe. Peter Waldo began to use the vernacular language in his version, however coarse, of the Bible for the Vaudois, those earliest reformers of the Church; and, though the volume was suppressed and prohibited, a modern French literary historian deduces the taste for writing in the maternal tongue to this rude but great attempt to attract the attention of the people. The same incident occurred in our own annals; and it was the English Bible of

Edward the Sixth which opened the sealed treasures of our native language to the multitude. Calvin wrote his great work, "The Institute of the Christian Religion," at the same time in the Latin language and in the French; and thus it happens that both these works are alike original. Calvin deemed, that, to render the people intelligent, their instructor should be intelligible; and that, if books are written for a great purpose, they are only excellent in the degree that they are multiplied. Calvin addressed, not a few erudite recluses, but a whole nation.

It is unquestionable that the Reformation began to diminish the veneration for the Latin language. Whether from the love of novelty, or rather by that transition to a new system of human affairs, the pedantry of ancient standing was giving way to the cultivation of a national tongue. A great revolution was fast approaching, which would give a new direction to the studies of the scholastic gentry, and introduce a new mode of addressing the people. It was a revolution alarming those who would have walled in public opinion by circumscribing all knowledge to a privileged class. A remarkable evidence of this disposition appears in an incident which occurred to Sir THOMAS WILSON, the author of two English treatises on the arts of Logic and of Rhetoric. An emigrant in the days of the Papistic Mary, he was arraigned at Rome before the Inquisition, on the general charge of heresy, but especially for having written his "Arts of Logic" and "of Rhetoric" in a language which, at least we may presume, the whole conclave could not have criticised. The torture was not only shown to him, but he tells us that "he had felt some smart of it." The dark inquisitors taught our critic a new canon in his own favorite arts; and our English Aristarchus soon discovered how far those perfidious arts of reasoning and of eloquence may betray the hapless orator, when his words are listened to by malicious judges equally skilled in mutilating sentences or catching at loose words. "They

brought down my great heart by telling me plainly that my *defence* had put me into further peril." Our baffled rhetorician saw that his only safety was to abstain from using the great instrument of his art, which was now locked up in silence. He was left, as he expresses himself, "without all help and without all hope, not only of liberty, but also of life." He escaped by a strange incident. It would seem, that, in an insurrection of the populace, they set fire to the prison, and in a burst of popular freedom, forgetful of their bigotry, or from the spirit of vengeance on their hateful masters, they suffered the heretics to creep out of their cells, — an ebullition of public spirit in "the worthy Romans," which the luckless English expounder of logic and rhetoric might well account as "an enterprise never before attempted." On Wilson's return to England, he was solicited to revise his admirable "Art of Rhetoric;" but he strenuously refused to "meddle with it, either hot or cold." Still smarting from the torture which his innocent progeny had occasioned, he seems to have alleviated his martyrdom with the quaint humor of a querulous prologue.

In these awful transitions from one state of society to another, even the most sagacious are predisposed to discover what they secretly wish. Erasmus foresaw that a great change was approaching; but, although he has delivered a prediction, it seems doubtful whether he had discerned the object aright. "I see," he writes, "a certain golden age ready to arise, which perhaps will not be my lot to partake of; yet I congratulate the world, and the younger sort I congratulate, in whose minds, however, Erasmus shall live and remain, by the remembrance of good offices he hath done." These "good offices" were restricted to his ardent labors in classical literature; but did Erasmus foresee in the change the subversion of the papal system by which Luther had often terrified the timid quietness of our gentle recluse, or the rise of the vernacular literature which had yet no exist-

ence? Erasmus, indeed, was so little sensible of this approaching change, that his amusing "Colloquies," and his "Panegyric on Folly," whose satirical humor had been so happily adapted to open the minds of men, he confined to the lettered circles; as Sir Thomas More did his "Utopia," which, had it been intelligible to the people, might have impressed them with some principles of political government. The sage of Rotterdam imagined that the great movement of the age was to restore the classical pursuits of antiquity, and never dreamed of that, which, in opposition to the ancient, soon obtained the distinction of "the New Learning," as it is expressed by Roger Ascham, — the knowledge which was adapted to the wants and condition of the people. Erasmus would have been startled at the truth, that the language of antiquity would even be neglected by the generality of writers; that every European nation would have classics of their own; and that the finest geniuses would make their appeals to the people in the language of the people.

The predilection for composing in the Roman language long continued among the most illustrious writers both at home and abroad. A judicious critic in the reign of James I., Edmund Bolton, in his "Nero Cæsar," recommends that the history of England should be composed in Latin by the classical pen of the learned Sir Henry Saville, the editor of "Chrysostom." It is indeed a curious circumstance, that, when an English play was performed at the University of Cambridge before Queen Elizabeth, the vice-chancellor was called on to remonstrate with the ministers of Elizabeth against such a derogation of the learning and the dignity of the university. This very vice-chancellor, who had to protest against all English comedies, had, however, himself been the writer of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," which was long considered to be the first attempt at English comedy.* This

* Collier's "History of Dramatic Poetry," ii. 463.

conduct of the university offered no encouragement to men of learning and genius to compose in their vernacular idiom.

The genius of VERULAM, whose prescient views often anticipated the institutions and the discoveries of succeeding times, appears never to have contemplated the future miracles of his maternal tongue. Lord BACON did not foresee that the English language would one day be capable of embalming all that philosophy can discover or poetry can invent; that his country, at length, would possess a national literature, and exult in models of its own. So little did Lord Bacon esteem the language of his country, that his favorite works are composed in Latin; and what he had written in English he was anxious to have preserved, as he expresses himself, in "that universal language which may last as long as books last." It might have surprised Lord Bacon to have been told, that the learned in Europe would one day study English authors to learn to think and write, and prefer his own "Essays," in their living pith, to the colder transfusions of the Latin versions of his friends. The taste of the philosophical chancellor was probably inferior to his invention. Our illustrious CAMDEN partook largely of this reigning fatuity when he wrote the reign of Elizabeth, — the history of his contemporaries, and the "Britannia," — the history of our country, in the Latin language; as did BUCHANAN that of Scotland, and DE THOU his great history, which includes that of the Reformation in France. All these works, addressed to the deepest sympathies of the people, were not imparted to them.

There was a peculiar absurdity in composing modern history in the ancient language of a people alike foreigners to the feelings as well as to the nature of the transactions. The Latin had neither proper terms to describe modern customs, nor fitting appellatives for titles and for names and places. The fastidious delicacy of the writers of modern Latinity could not endure to vitiate their classical purity by the Gothic names

of their heroes, and of the barbarous localities where memorable transactions had occurred. These great authors, in their despair, actually preferred to shed an obscurity over their whole history, rather than to disturb the collocation of their numerous diction. Buchanan and De Thou, by a ludicrous play on words, translated the proper names of persons and of places. A Scottish worthy, *Wiseheart*, was dignified by Buchanan with a Greek denomination, *Sophocardus:* so that, in a history of Scotland, the name of a conspicuous hero does not appear, or must be sought for in a Greek lexicon, which, after all, may require a punster for a reader. The history of De Thou is thus frequently unintelligible; and two separate indexes of names and places, and the public stations which his personages held, do not always agree with the copy preserved in the family. The names of the persons are Latinized according to their etymology, and all public offices are designated by those Roman ones which bore some fancied affinity. But the modern office was ill indicated by the ancient. The constable of France, a military charge, differed from the *magister equitum*, and the marshals of France from the *tribunus equitum*. His equivocal personages are not always recognized in this travesty of their Roman masquerade.

A remarkable instance of the gross impropriety of composing an English history in Latin, and of the obstinate prejudice of the learned, who imagined that the ancient idiom conferred dignity on a theme wholly vernacular, appeared when the delegates of Oxford purchased ANTHONY WOOD'S elaborate work on "the History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford." Our honest antiquary, with a true vernacular feeling, had written the history of an English university, during an uninterrupted labor of ten years, in his artless but natural idiom. The learned delegates opined that it was humiliating the Oxford press to have its history pass through it in the language of the country; and Dr. Fell, with others, was chosen to dignify it into Latin. What was the result of this pompous and

inane labor? The author was sorely hurt at the sight of his fair offspring disguised in its foreign and fantastic dress. What was clear in English, was obscure in the circumlocution of rotund periods and affected phraseologies. The circumstantial narrative and the local descriptions, so interesting to an English reader, were not only superfluous, but repulsive to the foreigner. ANTHONY WOOD indignantly retranscribed the whole of his English copy, and left the fair volumes to the care of the university itself; not without the hope, which has been realized, that his work should be delivered to posterity stamped by its author's native genius.*

Such was the crisis, and such the difficulties and the obstructions, of that native literature in whose prosperous state every European people now exults. Homogeneous with their habitual associations, moulded by their customs and manners, and everywhere stamped by the peculiar organization of each distinct race, we see the vernacular literature ever imbued with the qualities of the soil whence it springs, diversified, yet ever true to nature. Had the native genius of the great luminaries of literature not found a vein which could reach to the bumblest of their compatriots, they who are now the creators of our vernacular literature had remained but pompous plagiarists or frigid babblers, and the moderns might still have been pacing in the trammels of a mimetic antiquity.

* We now possess this valued literary history, which none, perhaps, but Anthony à Wood could have so fervently pursued, — "the History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford," in five volumes quarto. Edited by John Gutch. It is a distinct work from the far-known "Athenæ Oxonienses." Why did this great work, as well as some others, come forth with a Latin title? This absurdity was a remaining taint of the ancient prejudice. But an English work was not the more classical for bearing a Latin title.

ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

JOHNSON pronounced it impossible to ascertain when our speech ceased to be Saxon, and began to be English; and although, since his day, English philology has extended its boundaries, the lines of demarcation are very movable for the literary antiquary. At whatever point we set out, we may find that something which preceded has been omitted. A century may pass away, and leave no precise epoch; and transitions of words and styles, like shades melting into each other, may elude perception. Too often wanting sufficient data, the toil of the antiquary becomes baffled, and the microscopic eye of the philologist pores on empty space. The learned have their theories; but in darkness we are doomed to grope, and in a circle we can fix on no beginning.

The elegant researches of Ellis, the antiquarian lore of Ritson, the simplicity of taste of Percy, the poetic fervor of Campbell, the elaborate diligence of Sharon Turner, and more recent names skilled in Saxon lore, have given opposite hypotheses, conjectures, and refutations. "A modification of language is not in reality a change," observes a powerful researcher in literary history,* who is at a loss "whether some compositions shall pass for the latest offspring of the mother, or the earliest fruit of the daughter's fertility," — a shrewd suspicion which the genealogists of words may entertain concerning the legitimate and the illegitimate, or the pure and the corrupt.

* Mr. Hallam.

The Saxon language had been tainted by some Latin terms from the ecclesiastics, and some fashionable Normanisms from the court of the Confessor; when the Norman-French, fatal as the arrow which pierced Harold, by a single blow struck down that venerable form, and never has it arisen. And now, with all its pomp, such as it was, it lies entombed and coffined in some scanty manuscripts.

We indeed triumph, that the language of our forefathers never did depart from the land, since it survived among the people. What survived? It soon ceased to be a written tongue; for no one cared to cultivate an idiom no longer required, and utterly contemned. After the Conquest, the miserable Saxons lost their "book-craft." We find nothing written but the continuation of a meagre chronicle. A few pietists still lingered in occasional homilies, and a solitary charter has been perpetuated; but the style was already changed, and, as a literary language, the Anglo-Saxon had for ever departed. It had sunk to the people, and they treated the ancient idiom after their fashion. The language of books served not simple men: laying aside its inflections and its inversions and its arbitrary construction, they chose a shorter and more direct conveyance of their thoughts, and only kept to a language fitted to the business of daily life. This getting free from the encumbrances of the Anglo-Saxon we may consider formed the obscure beginnings of THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. All the gradual changes or the sudden innovations through more than two centuries may not be perceivable by posterity: but philologists have marked out how first the inversion was simplified, and then the inflections dropped; how the final *e* became mute, and at length was ejected; how ancient words were changed, and Norman neologisms introduced. As this English cleared itself of the nebulosity, the anomalies, and all the complex machinery, of the mother idiom, a natural style was formed, very homely; for this vaunted Saxon now came from the mouths of the people, and

from those friends of the people, the monks, who only wrote for their humble brother-Saxons. The English writers, who were composing in French, and the more learned, who displayed their clerkship by their Latinity, had a standard of literature which would regulate or advance their literary workmanship; but there was no standard in the language of bondage: it had mixed, as Ritson oddly describes it, "with one knows not what," a disorganization of words and idioms. Numerous DIALECTS pervaded the land. The East and the West agreed as ill together as both did with the North and the South; and they who wrote for the people, each chose the dialect of their own shire.

The "Saxon Chronicle," which closes with the year 1155, had been continued at progressive intervals by different writers. This authentic document of the Anglo-Saxon diction exhibits remarkable variations of style; and a critical Saxonist has detected the corruptions of its idiom, its inflections, and its orthography; in a word, that, through successive periods, it had suffered a material alteration in its character.*

Somewhat more than a century after the Norman invasion, about 1180, Layamon made an English version of Wace's "Brut," — that French metrical chronicle which the Anglo-Norman had drawn from the Latin history of Geoffry of Monmouth. Here we detect an entire changeableness of style, or rather a transformation; but what to call it, the most skilful have not agreed. George Ellis drew a copious specimen of a writer unnoticed by Warton; but, confounded by "its strange orthography," and mournfully doubtful of his own meritorious glossary, he considered the style, "though simple and unmixed, yet a very barbarous Saxon." A recent critic opines that Layamon "seems to have halted between two languages, — the written and the spoken." Mr. Campbell imagines it "the dawn" of our language, while some Saxonists

* Dr. Bosworth.

have branded it as semi-Saxon. It seems a language thrown into confusion, struggling to adapt itself to a new state of things: it has no Norman-French, it is saturated with Saxon, but the sentences are freed from inversions.*

About the same period as Layamon's version of Wace, we have a very original attempt of a writer, in those days of capricious pronunciation, to convey to the reader the orthoepy by regulating the orthography. As it is only recently that we have obtained any correct notion of a writing which has suffered many misconceptions from our earlier English scholars, the history of this work becomes a bibliographical curiosity.

An ecclesiastic paraphrased the Gospel-histories. He was a critical writer, projecting a system to which he strictly adhered, warning his transcribers as punctually to observe, otherwise "they would not write the word right:" they were therefore "to write those letters twice which he had written so." The system consisted in doubling the consonant after a short vowel to regulate the pronunciation. He wrote brother*r* and after*rr*; is, *iss*; and it, *itt*.†

It is evident that this critical was also a refined writer; for it indicated some delicacy, when we find him apologizing for certain additions in his version, which was metrical, not found in the original, and merely used by him for the convenience of

* Of this recondite writer, Ellis has said, "Probably Layamon never will be printed;" but we live in an age of publication, and Layamon is said to be actually in the press. [Since this was written, the work has been published at the cost of the Society of Antiquaries, under the editorial care of Sir Frederick Madden.]

† Dr. Bosworth or Mr. Thorpe has explained this attempt more fully. "From this idea of doubling the consonant after a short vowel, as in German, we are enabled to form some tolerably accurate notions as to the pronunciation of our forefathers. Thus Orm (or Ormin) writes *min* and *win* with a single *n* only, and *lif* with a single *f*, because the *i* is long, as in *mine*, *wine*, and *life*. On the other hand, wherever the consonant is doubled, the vowel preceding is sharp and short, as *winn* pronounced *win*, not *wine*." — "Origin of the Germanic and Scandinavian Languages," 24.

filling up his metre. The first literary historians to whose lot it fell to record this anomalous work, among whom were HICKES and WANLEY, judging by appearances, in the superabundance of the rugged consonants, deemed this refined Anglo-Saxon's writing as the work of an ignorant scribe, or as a rude provincial dialect, or harsh enough to be the work of an English Dane. Its metrical form eluded all detection, as the verses were a peculiar metre of fifteen syllables, all jumbled together as prose: as such they gave some extracts; but it is evident that this was done with little intelligence of their author. TYRWHIT, occupied on his "Chaucer," had a more percipient ear for these Anglo-Saxon metres, and discovered that this prose was strictly metrical; but he surely advanced no farther: he did not discover the writer's design, that "the Ennglisshe writ" was for "Ennglisshe menn to lare," — to learn. Indeed, Tyrwhit, who complains that Hickes, in noticing this peculiarity of spelling, "has not explained the author's reason for it," himself so little comprehended the system of the double consonants, that in his extract, humorously "begging pardon" of this old and odd reformer, whom the critic was not only offending, but massacring, "for not following his injunctions," he discards "all the superfluous letters," — not aware that it was the intention of the writer to preserve the orthoepy. Even our Anglo-Saxon historian missed the secret; for he has remarked on the words, that they were "needlessly loaded with double consonants." Yet he was not wholly insensible to the substantial qualities of the writer; for he discovered in the diction, that "the order of words is uniformly more natural, the inflections are more unfrequent, and the phrases of our English begin to emerge." And, finally, our latest authority decides, that this work, so long misinterpreted, is "the oldest, the purest, and by far the most valuable specimen of our old English dialect that time has left us." *

* Guest's "Hist. of English Rhythms," ii. 186.

What is "old English" is the question. The title of this work may have perplexed the first discoverers as much as the double consonants. The writer was an ecclesiastic of the name of ORM; and he was so fascinated with his own work, for the purity of its diction, and the precision of its modulated sounds, that, in a literary rapture, he baptized it with reference to himself; and *Orm* fondly called his work the "Ormulum." One hardly expected to meet with such a Narcissus of literature in an old Anglo-Saxon philologist of the year so far gone by; yet we now find that Orm might fairly exult in his "Ormulum."

Nearly a century after Layamon, in the same part of England, the monk, ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER, wrote his "Chronicle," about 1280. This honest monk painfully indited for his brother-Saxons the whole history of England, in the shape of Alexandrine verse in rhyme: the diction of the verse approaches so nearly to prose, that it must have been the colloquial idiom of the west. The "Ingliss," as it was called in the course of the century between Layamon and Robert of Gloucester, betrays a striking change; and modern philologists have given the progressive term of "middle English" to the language from this period to the Reformation.* Our chronicler has fared ill with posterity, of whom, probably, he never dreamt. Robert of Gloucester, who is entirely divested of a poetical character, as are all rhyming chroniclers, has had the hard hap of being criticised by two merciless poets; and, to render his uncouthness still more repulsive, the black-letter fanaticism of his editor has vauntingly arrayed the monk, whom he venerated, in the sable Gothic, bristling with the

* During the thirteenth century, the organic change proceeded so rapidly, that there is quite as wide a difference between the language of Layamon and that which was written at the beginning of the fourteenth century (about the time of Robert of Gloucester), as there is between the English language of the reign of Edward the Second and the tongue of the present day. — See Mr. Wright's learned "Essay on the Literature of the Anglo-Saxons," 107.

Saxon characters.* It has, therefore, required something like a physical courage to sit down to Robert of Gloucester. Yet, in the rhymer whom Warton has degraded, Ellis has discovered a metrical annalist whose orations are almost eloquent, whose characters of monarchs are energetic; and what he records of his own age, matter worthy of minute history.

Another monk, ROBERT MANNYNG, of Brunne, or Bourne, in Lincolnshire, who had versified PIERS LANGTOFT'S "Chronicle," has left a translation of the "Manuel des Péchés," ascribed to Bishop Grosteste, who composed it in politer French. In this "Manual of Sins," or, as he terms it, "A Handlyng of Sinne," according to monkish morality and the monkish devices to terrify sinners, our recreative monk has introduced short tales, some grave and some he deemed facetious, which convey an idea of domestic life and domestic language. It is not without curiosity that we examine these, the earliest attempts at that difficult trifle,—the art of telling

* Hearne, in his preface, exclaims in ecstasy, "This is the *first book* ever printed in this kingdom, it may be in *the whole world, in the black-letter*, with a mixture of *the Saxon characters*, which is the very garb that was in vogue in the author's time; that is, in the thirteenth century." Hearne often claims our gratitude, while his earnest simplicity will extort a smile. On our ancient Bibles he could not refrain from exclaiming, "Though I have taken so much pleasure in perusing the English Bible of the year 1541, yet 'tis nothing equal to that I should take in turning over that of the year 1539." His antiquarianism kindled his piety over Cranmer's Bible.

Thomas was haunted by a chimera, that whatever was obsolete deserved to be revived. This honest spirit of antiquarianism, working on a most undiscerning intellect, seems to have kindled into a literary bigotry in his sateless delight of "the black-letter of our grandfathers' days." Hearne set this unhappy example of printing ancient writers with all their obsolete repulsiveness in orthography and type. He was closely followed by RITSON, and by WHITAKER in his edition of "Piers Ploughman;" and these editors assuredly have scared away many a neophyte in our vernacular literature. RITSON printed his "Ancient Songs" with the Saxon characters and abbreviations, which render them often unintelligible. This literary antiquary lived to regret this superstitious antiquarianism. He had prepared a new edition entirely cleared of these offences, but which unfortunately he destroyed at the morbid close of his life.

a short tale. Robert de Brunne is neither a Mat Prior nor a La Fontaine, but he is a block which might have been carved into one or the other; and he shows, that, without much art, a tale may be tolerably told.* His octosyllabic verse is more fluent than the protracted Alexandrine of his "Chronicle." The words fall together in natural order, and we seem to have advanced in this rude and artless "Ingliss." But the most certain evidence that "the English" was engaging the attention of those writers who professedly were devoting their pens to those whom they called "the commonalty," is, that they now began to criticise; and we find Robert de Brunne continually protesting against "strange Ingliss." This phrase has rather perplexed our inquirers. "Strange Ingliss" would seem to apply to certain novelties in diction used by the tale-reciters and harpers; for so our monk tells us:—

"I wrote
In symple speeche as I couthe,
That is *lightest in manne's mouthe.*
I mad (made) nought for no disoûrs (tale-tellers),
Ne for no seggers nor harpoûrs,
Bot for the luf (love) *of* symple menn
That *strange Inglis* cann not ken."

It was about this time that the metrical romances, translated from the French, spread in great number, and introduced many exotic phrases. In the celebrated romance of "Alisaundre" we find French expressions, unalloyed by any attempt at Anglicizing them, overflowing the page. The phrase is, however, once applied to certain strange metres which our monk avoided; for many "that read English would be confounded by them."

Whatever Robert de Brunne might allude to by his "strange

* Turner's "History of England," v. 217, will furnish the curious reader readily with several of these specimens of the modes of thinking and of acting of the middle ages, when monks only were the preceptors of mankind.

Ingliss,"* the same cry and the identical expressions are repeated by a writer not many years afterwards, — RICHARD ROLLE, called "the Hermit of Hampole." He produced the earliest versions of the Psalms into English prose, with a commentary on each verse; and a voluminous poem in ten thousand lines, entitled "the Prikke of Conscience," translated from the Latin for "the unletterd men of Engelonde who can only understand English." In the prologue to this first Psalter in English prose, he says, "I seke no *straunge Ynglyss*, bot *lightest* and *communest*, and wilk (such) that is most like unto the Latyn: and thos I fine (I find) no proper Inglis, I felough (follow) the wit of the words; so that thai that knowes noght (not) the Latyne, be (by) the Ynglys may come to many Latyne wordys." Here we arrive at open corruption! Already a writer appears refined enough to complain of the poverty of the language in furnishing "proper Inglis" or synonymes for the Latin. The next step must follow; and that would be, in due time, the Latinizing "the Ynglys."

* This term of "strange Ingliss" has yet been found so obscure as to occasion some strictures, which, like the Interpreter in the Critic, are the most difficult to comprehend. I must refer to Monsieur Thierry's very delightful "History of the Conquest of England," ii. 271, for a very refined speculation on our Robert de Brunne's unlucky obscurity. Monsieur Thierry imagines that the "strange Ingliss" was the refined English which had flown into Scotland, and there become the cultivated language of the minstrels and the court, and which our hapless Saxons on *this side of the Tweed* had sunk into a dialect only fitted for serfs. This finer and more elevated English could not be understood by a base commonalty: this was "strange Ingliss" to them. A very interesting event in the history of both nations had transplanted the purer English to the Scottish court: Malcolm, whom the usurpation of Macbeth had driven from the Scottish throne, was expatriated in England during an interval of near twenty years. The affection of the monarch for the English was such, that he adopted their language; and, when the royal family of England was expelled by the Conqueror, the king received them and the emigrant Saxons, and married the English princess. This gave rise to that intercourse with the south of Scotland, of which the result in our literary, if not in our civil history, is remarkable. Certain it is that much broad Scotch is good old English, and the noblest minstrelsy cometh "fra the North Countrie."

A great curiosity of the genuine homeliness of our national idiom at this time has come down to us in a manuscript in the Arundel Collection, now in our national library. It is a volume written by a monk of St. Austin's at Canterbury, in the Kentish dialect, about a century and a half after Layamon, and half a century after Robert of Gloucester, in 1340. This honest monk, like others of the Saxon brotherhood, was writing for his humbled countrymen, or as he expresses himself, with a rude Doric simplicity,—

"Vor Vader and for Moder and for other Ken."

I throw into a note what I have transcribed of this specimen of the old Saxon-English, or, as it is called, "Semi-Saxon."* In this specimen of the language as spoken by the people, the barbarism is native, pure in its impurity, and unalloyed by any spurious exotic. This English spoken in the Weald of Kent, Caxton tells us, in his time, was "as broad and rude English as is spoken in any place in England." When contrasted with the diction of a Northern bard, whom

* On the leaf appears, in the handwriting of the author, "This Boc is Dan Michelis of Northgate ywrite an Englis of his ozene hand that hatte *Ayenbyte of inwyt*, and is of the boc-house of Seynt Austyn's of Cantorberi." The writer was seventy years of age; and he tells us that he was not—

"Blind, and dyaf, and alsuo dumb,
Of seventy yer al not rond,
Ne seette by drase to the grond,
Uor peny nor mark, ne nor pond."

At the end, the monk tells us for whom he writes:—

"Nou ich wille that ye ywite hou hitt is ywent
Thet this Boc is ywrite mid Engliss of Kent.
This Boc is ymade vor lewede men,
Vor Vader and vor Moder and vor other Ken,
Ham vor to berse uram alle manyere Zen
Thet ine have inwytte ne bleue no uoul wen.
Huo ase God is his name ysed
Thet this Boc made God him yeue that bread
Of Angles of Hauene and thereto his red,
And underuonge his Zoule, huanne that is dyad."

a singular accident retrieved for us,* it offers a curious picture of the English language, so different at precisely the same period. The minstrel's flow of verse almost anticipates the elegance of a writer of two centuries later.

The poems of LAURENCE MINOT consist of ten narrative ballads on some of the wars of Edward the Third in Scotland and in France. The events this bard records show that his writings were completed in 1352. His editor is surprised that "the great monarch whom he so eloquently and so earnestly panegyrized was either ignorant of his existence or insensible of his merit." Minot was probably nothing more than a Northern minstrel, whose celebrity did not extend many leagues. His verses convey to us a perfect conception of the minstrel character, throwing out his almost extemporaneous "Lays" on the predominant incidents of his day. All these narrative poems open by soliciting the attention of the auditors: —

"LITHES! and I sall tell you tyll
The bataile of Halidon Hyll."

And in another: —

"HERKINS how long King Edward lay,
With his men before Tournay."

The singularity of these "Lays" consists in coming down to us in a written form, evidently with great care and fondness, bearing their author's unknown name. They might

* While Tyrwhit was busied on the "Canterbury Tales," his attention was excited by the old cataloguer of the Cottonian manuscripts to a *Chaucer exemplar emendate scriptum.* On a spare leaf the name of Richard Chawfer had been scrawled, which might have been that of some former possessor. There are two fatalities which hang over the pen of a slumbering cataloguer, — ignorance and indolence. Our present one caught an immortal name, and never travelled onwards; and, struck by the fairness of the writing, inferred that it was a copy of Chaucer critically accurate. It turned out to be the compositions of an unknown poet, who not willingly relinquished his claim on posterity; for he has subscribed his name, LAURENCE MINOT. [The manuscript is marked Galba, E. IX.: specimens were first published from it by Tyrwhit and Warton, and the entire series ultimately by Ritson.]

have appropriately been preserved in Percy's "Reliques of English Poetry."*

Three centuries had now passed, and still the national genius languished in the Norman bondage of the language. But the commonalty were increasing in number and in weight, and an indignant sense of the destitution of a national language was not confined to the laity: it was attracting the attention of those who thought and who wrote. Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham, who put forth the first bibliographical treatise by an Englishman, and may be ranked among the earliest critical collectors of a private library, in his celebrated treatise on the love of books, the "Philo-biblion,"† breathes all the enthusiasm of study; but, while he directs our attention to the classical writers of antiquity, he stimulates his contemporaries to emulate them by composing new books. Although he himself wrote in Latin, he regrets that no institution for children in the English language existed; and he complains that our English youth "first learned the French, and from the French the Latin." Our youth were sent into France to polish their nasal Norman. This writer flourished about 1330, and thus ascertains, that, in the beginning of the reign of Edward III., no English was taught. The "Polychronicon," a Latin chronicle compiled by the monk Higden, was finished somewhat later, — about 1365; and we find the complaint more bitterly renewed. "There is no nation," wrote this honest monk, "whose children are compelled to leave their own language, as we have since the Normans came into England. A gentleman's child must

* Ritson's first edition (1795) of Minot having become very difficult to procure, an elegant re-impression, and apparently a correct one, was published in 1825.

† "Philobiblion, sive de Amore Librorum et Institutione Bibliothecæ," ascribed to Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham; but Fabricius says it was written by Robert Holcot, a learned friar, at his desire. — FAB.: *Bib. Med. Ævi*, vol. i. It is the bishop, however, who was the collector, and always speaks in his own person. It has been recently translated by Mr. Inglis.

speak French from the time that he is rocked in a cradle or plays with a child's breche."

The Latin Chronicle of Higden, twenty years later, was translated into English by John de Trevisa. On this passage the translator furnishes the important observation, that, since this was written, a revolution had occurred through our grammar-schools: the patriotic efforts of one Sir John Cornewaile, in teaching his pupils to construe their Latin into English, had been generally adopted; "so that now," proceeds Trevisa, "the yere of our Lorde 1385, in all the grammere scoles of Engelond, children leaveth Frensche, and construeth and lerneth in Englische." The innovation had startled our translator; for, like all innovations, there was loss as well as profit, when, quitting what we are accustomed to, we launch dubiously into a new acquisition. The disuse of the French would detriment their intercourse abroad, and, on great occasions, at home. This was a time when Trevisa himself, in selecting some scriptural inscriptions for the chapel of Berkley Castle, where he was chaplain, had them painted on boards in Norman-French and Latin, in alternate lines. They are still visible. English itself was yet too base for the service of God.

It was still a debatable question, as appears by the prefatory dialogue between Trevisa and his patron, Lord Berkley, whether any translation of the Chronicle were at all necessary, Latin being the general language. It was, however, a noble enterprise, being the first great effort in our vernacular prose. This mighty volume is a universal history, which, in its amplitude and miscellaneous character, seemed to contain all that men could know; and the version long enjoyed the favor of all readers as the first historical collection in the English language. It bears the seal of the monkish taste, being equally pious and fabulous. It not only opens before the days of Adam, but, like the creation, has its seven divisions: it has monsters, however, which are not found in Genesis.

The monk is doubtful whether they came of Adam or of Noah. They indeed came from the elder Pliny, to whose puerile wonders and hasty compilation we owe the foundation of our natural history.

It was about the period that Higden concluded his labors, that Sir John Mandeville deemed it wise, having written his Travels in Latin and French, to compose them also in the vernacular idiom; a strong indication of the rising disposition to cultivate the national tongue. The policy of our Government now accorded with the general disposition; and hence originated the noble decision of Edward III., in 1362, — to banish from our courts of law the Norman-French: but so awkward seemed this great novelty, that the statute is written in the very language it abolishes,* and indeed to which our great lawyers, the timid slaves of precedents, long afterwards clung in their barbarous law-French phrases mingled with their native English.

* Barrington on the Statutes.

In Blackstone's "Commentaries," book iii. chap. 21, we find much curious information, and some philosophical reflections. The use of the technical law-Latin is adroitly defended. Under Cromwell, the records were turned into English; at the Restoration, the practisers declared they could not express themselves so significantly in English, and they returned to their Latin. In 1730, a statute ordered that the proceedings at law should be done into English, that the common people might understand the process, &c. But, after many years' experience, the people are as ignorant in matters of law as before, and suffer the inconveniences of increasing *the expense of all legal proceedings* by being bound by the stamp-duties to write only a stated number of words in a sheet; *and the English language, through the multitude of its particles, is so much more verbose than the Latin, that the number of sheets is much augmented.* Two years subsequently, it was necessary to make a new act to allow all technical terms to continue Latin, which were too ridiculous to be translated; such as *nisi prius*, *fieri facias*, *habeas corpus*. This last act, in 1732, has defeated every beneficial purpose intended by the preceding statute of 1730.

One hardly expected to find philological acumen in the dry discussion of law-Latin; but when the *three* words, *secundum formam statuti*, require *seven* in English, "according to the form of the statute," one easily comprehends the heavy weight of the *stamp-duty* for *writing English*. The Saxons, who made no use of particles of speech, had more merit than we were aware of.

A mightier movement even than the royal decree in favor of fostering the national language was a translation of the Scriptures by the intrepid spirit of Wickliffe. This had been done with the pledge of his life; for that was often in peril while he thus struck the first impulse of that reformation which not only influenced his own age, but one more remote. The translation of Wickliffe was a new revelation of the word of God in the language of many. The streets were crowded with Lollards, as his followers were denominated, of which, like similar odious names attached to a rising party, the origin remains uncertain: Lollardy was, however, a convenient term to describe treason in the Church and the State. Wickliffe's translation of the Old Testament still lies in numerous manuscripts, for our cold neglect of which we have incurred the censure of the foreigner. The New Testament has happily been printed.*

If we place by the side of the text of Wickliffe our later versions, we may become familiar with that Saxon-English which our venerable Caxton subsequently considered was "more like to Dutch than English."

But the picturesque language of our emotions, the creative diction of poetry, appeared in the courtly style of Chaucer, who nobly designed to render the national language refined and varied, while his great contemporaries, the author of Piers Ploughman, lingered in a rude dialect, and Gower was still composing alternately in Latin and in French.

* By the Rev. JOHN LEWIS, 1731, fol.; and republished by the Rev. H. H. BABER, 1810, 4to.

The censure of Fabricius deserves our notice. After mention of Wickliffe's version of the Bible, he adds, "Mirum est Anglos eam (versionem) tam diu neglexisse quum vel linguæ causa ipsis in pretio esse debeat." — *Bib. Lat.*, v. 321.

It is provoking to be reminded of our neglected duties by a foreigner. We might assuredly be curious to learn how the sublimity and the colloquial and narrative parts of this vast treasure of our ancient language were produced under the primitive pen of Wickliffe. A fine copy of Wickliffe's Bible was in the library of Mr. Douce; and I have heard, with great satisfaction, that it will probably be edited by Sir Francis Madden.

The emancipation of the national language was subsequently confirmed by another monarch. A curious anecdote in our literary history has recently been disclosed of Henry V. To encourage the use of the vernacular tongue, this monarch, in a letter missive to one of the city companies, declared that "*the English tongue hath in modern days begun to be honorably enlarged and adorned; and, for the better understanding of the people*, the common idiom should be exercised in writing." This was at once setting aside the Norman-French and the Latin for the daily business of civil life. By this record, it appears that many of the craft of brewers, to whose company this letter was addressed, had "knowledge of writing and reading in the English idiom, but Latin and French they by no means understood." We further learn that now "the LORDS and the COMMONS BEGAN *to have their proceedings noted down in the mother-tongue;*" and this example was therefore to be followed by the city companies.*

At this advanced age of transition, so unsettled was the language of ordinary affairs, that the same document bears evidence of three different idioms. We find the petition of an Irish chieftain, a prisoner in the Tower, written in the French language, while the indorsed royal answer is in English, and the order of the council in Latin.† The bulletins of Henry V. to the mayor and aldermen of London are written in English, but indorsed in French.

As if they designed to hold out a model to their subjects, and to sanction the use of their native English, both this prince and his father Henry IV. left their wills in the national language,‡ at a time when the nobles employed Latin or French for such purposes.

There has often existed a sympathy between ourselves and

* Herbert's "History of the City Companies."

† I derive this curious fact from Mr. Tyler's "History of Henry of Monmouth," ii. 245.

‡ These wills are preserved in Mr. Nichols's "Collection of Royal Wills."

our near neighbors of France, when not disturbed by war. This great movement of establishing a national language, and freeing themselves from the Roman bondage, was tried at a later period by the French Government, who were nearly baffled in the attempt. An ordinance of Louis XII. was issued *to abolish the use of the Latin tongue;* but such was the prejudice in favor of the ancient language, that, notwithstanding that the Latin of the bar had degenerated into the most ludicrous barbarism, the lawyers were unwilling to yield to the popular wish. The use of Latin in France in all legal instruments lasted till the succeeding reign of Francis I., who, by two ordinances, declared that THE FRENCH LANGUAGE should be solely used in all public acts. It was, however, as late as forty years after, in 1629, that at length the public offices consented to draw their instruments in their vernacular language.* So long has general improvement to contend with the force of habit and the passion of prepossession; and such were the difficulties which the vernacular style of both these great empires had to overcome.

When the learned HICKES, in his patriotic fervor to trace the legitimacy of the English from its parent language, adjudged that "nine-tenths of our words were of Saxon origin," he exultingly appealed to the Lord's Prayer, wherein there are only three words of French or Latin extraction. This startled TYRWHIT, then busied on his Chaucerian glossary, and who, in that labor, had before him a different aspect of our mottled English. That was not the day when writers would maintain opinions against authority. Awed by the great Saxonist, the poetical antiquary compromised; alleging, that "though the *form* of our language was still Saxon, yet the *matter* was in a great measure French." His successor in English philology, GEORGE ELLIS, still further faltered and arbitrated; suggesting that the great Saxonist,

* Le Comte de Neufchateau, "Essay on French Literature," prefixed to the late edition of Pascal's Works.

to complete his favorite scheme, would trace some *old Gaulish* French to a *Teutonic* origin. In tracing the formation of the English language, we are sensible that the broad and solid foundations lie in the Saxon; but the superstructure has often, with a magical movement, varied in its architecture. An enamoured Saxonist has recently ventured to assert that "English is but another term for Saxon;" but an ocular demonstration has been exhibited in specimens of the *modern English* of our master-writers, marking by Italics all the words of Saxon derivation. By these it appears that the translators of the Bible have happily preserved for us the pristine simplicity of our Saxon-English; like the light in a cathedral, through its storied and saintly window, shedding its antique hues on hallowed objects. But, as we advance, we discover in our most eminent writers the Anglicisms diminish; and SHARON TURNER has observed that a fifth of the Saxon language has ceased to be used. A recent critic * has curiously calculated that the English language, now consisting of about thirty-eight thousand words, contains twenty-three thousand, or nearly five-eighths, Anglo-Saxon in their origin; that, in our most idiomatic writers, there is about one-tenth *not* Anglo-Saxon, and, in our least, about one-third.† A cry of our desertion of our Saxon purity has been raised by those who have not themselves practised it in their more elevated compositions; but are we to deem that English corrupted which recedes from its Saxon character, and compels the

* "Edinburgh Review," October, 1889.

† See "Quarterly Review," lix. 84. The critic is deeply imbued with his delight of Saxon-English. "The first bursts in our literature (probably the noblest are meant) are in almost pure Saxon." The critic particularly appeals to Milton for two instances; yet surely the Greekized, the Latinized, and even the Italianized Milton will not serve to assert the pre-eminence of our venerable dialect. "A country congregation" is its more certain test, where the language of the people is the only language required. Cobbett's writings throughout are Saxon-English. Coleridge considered Asgill and De Foe the most idiomatic writers.

daughter to lose the likeness of her mother? Are we to banish to perpetuity those foreigners who have already fructified our Saxon soil? In an age of extended literature, conversant with objects and productive of associations which never entered into the experience of our forefathers, the ancient language of the people must necessarily prove inadequate: a new language must start out of new conceptions. Look into our present "exchequer of words:" there lies many a refined coinage struck out of the arts and the philosophics of Europe. Every word which genius creates, and which time shall consecrate, is a possession of the language which must be inscribed into that variable doomsday-book of words, the English Dictionary. Devotees of Thor and Woden! the day of your idolatries has passed, and your remonstrances are vain as your superstitions.

VICISSITUDES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAG

THE vicissitudes of the English language are more evid
than its origin. In the history of a language, we are p
petually reminded, by the remonstrances of the critics,
the corruptions of its purity, the perils of innovation, and t
obtrusion of neologisms; while we find these same crit
fastidiously rejecting what they deem the antiquated and t
obsolete. Many causes are constantly operating these chan
of language. The style of one age ceases to be that
another; new modifications of thought create new mo
of expression; and as knowledge enlarges its sphere, a
society changes its manners, novel objects imperiously dema
adequate terms.

Our language has been subjected to those dominant eve
in the history of our country which have so powerfully inf
enced our genius and our destiny; and, our insular positi
occasioning a general intercourse with all the Continen
nations, our national idiom has been mottled by forei
neologisms.

For more than five centuries was the Saxon language t
language of England. The awful revolution of 1066 produc
novelties of all kinds, but none greater than the entire chan
in our Saxon language; which, however, our Norman mast
could never eradicate from among the people. During thr
centuries, most of our English writers composed in Fren
When Greek was first studied, in the reign of Henry t
Seventh, it planted many a Hellenism in our Englis

the translation of the Scriptures in that of Edward the Sixth, while it transmitted many Latinisms, at the same time revived the simplicity of the Saxon-English, which seemed to bear a sort of evidence that a primitive language was most suitable for primitive Christianity in contrast with the pompous corruptions of Rome.

Under Elizabeth, favorite phrases were insinuated into the dialect by over-refined travellers, who spoke "minion-like;" while the revolution of the Netherlands incorporated among us many a rough but vigorous inmate. In the days of James and Charles, the long residence of the Spanish Gondomar at our court, and the romantic pilgrimage of love to Madrid, and the political ties which bound the two nations, framed the style of courtesy, as well as set the fashions.

The puritanic commonwealth under Cromwell sunk down the language to its basest uses. Stripped to nakedness, the jargon of the market and the shop hid itself under the gibberish of its cant. Writers then abounded equally illiterate and fanatical. Perhaps we owe to these mean scribblers the scorn and pride with which Milton constructed, on the Latin model of inversions and involutions of sentences, his artificial and learned prose, unlike the style of his contemporaries, and which was never to be that of his successors: it was a machinery too costly for its price, and too unwieldy for the handling of an ordinary workman. Under the second Charles, we see the nation and the language equally Gallicized; and so it remained to the days of Anne. Suppose, for a moment, that, when the first Georges were appointed to the English throne, the Germany of that day had been the Germany of the present: what would have been the result? Instead of two torpid Germans, destitute of every sensibility to literature and art, we might have seen an accomplished Duke of Weimar at St. James's, and a Wieland, a Schiller, and a Goethe, at our court: our authors had been impressed by the German genius, in our emulation and delight. Such

is the simple history of the English language as it has been, or might have been, subjected to our national events.

The history of the vernacular language of other European nations discovers the same mutability, though not always produced by those great public incidents which may have been peculiar to ourselves. In Spain, however, we find that the possession of that land by the Moors has left in the Castilian language a whole dictionary of Arabic words, which now mingle with the vernacular idiom, and for ever shall bear witness of the triumphs of their ancient masters. But, in the history of a vernacular language, it may also happen that the first writers, combining in a singleness of taste, may construct a particular style. The earliest writers of France had modelled their taste by the Greek: Jodelle, Ronsard, Du Bartas, and others, imbued with Attic literature, Greekized the French idiom by their compounds, their novel terms, and their sonorous periphrases. The court and the ladies were adopting this new style; and, as usual, the unskilful were diverging into the most ridiculous affectations. But it was possible that the French language might have acquired a concision and vigor of which it is now destitute; for those early writers threw out a more original force than their tame successors. The artificial delicacy of the French critics has condemned these attempts as barbarisms; but to have transplanted these Atticisms into the native soil partook more of boldness than of barbarism. The attempt failed, if it could ever have succeeded, by the civil wars, which soon drew off the minds of men from the placable innovators of language.

The French, though not an insular people, have been subject to rapid revolutions in their language. The ancient Gaulish-French has long been as unintelligible to a modern Frenchman as our Saxon is to us: even those numerous poets of France, who, at a later period, composed in their *langue Romane*, are strewed in the fields of their poesy only as carcasses, which no miracle of antiquarian lore shall ever

resuscitate. Compare the style of one writer with another only two centuries later, or Rabelais with Voltaire. The age of Louis XIV. effected the most rapid change in the vernacular style, insomuch that the diction of the writers of the preceding reign of Louis XIII. had fallen obsolete in the short space of half a century. And yet the chastened style of the age of Louis XIV., with its cold imitation of classical antiquity, was to receive a higher polish from the hand of a Pascal, a novel brilliancy from the touch of a Montesquieu, and a more numerous prose from the impassioned Rousseau. The age of erudition and taste was to be succeeded by the more energetic age of genius and philosophy. An anecdote recorded of Vaugelas may possibly be true, and is a remarkable evidence of this perpetual mobility of style. This writer lived between 1585 and 1650, and, during thirty years, had been occupied, *more suo*, on a translation of Quintus Curtius. It was during this protracted period that the French style was passing through its rapid transitions. So many phrases had fallen superannuated, that this martyr to the purity of his diction was compelled to rewrite the former part of his version to modernize it with his later improved composition. The learned Menage lived to be old enough to have caught alarm at this vicissitude of taste, and did not scruple to avow that no work could last which was not composed in Latin.

The languages of highly cultivated nations are more subject to this innovation and variableness than the language of a people whose native penury receives but rare accessions. Hence the ancient and continued complaints through all the generations of critics, from the days of Julius Cæsar and Quintilian to those in which we are now writing.* The same hostility against novelty in words or in style is invariably proclaimed. The captiousness of criticism has usually referred to the style of the preceding authors as a standard

* "Curiosities of Literature," art. "History of New Words."

from which the prevalent style of its contemporaries has erringly diverged. The preceptors of genius at all times seem to have been insensible to the natural progress of language, resisting new qualities of style and new forms of expression. In reality, this was inferring that a perfect language exists, and that a creative genius must be trammelled by their limited and arbitrary systems. This prejudice of the venerable brotherhood may, I think, be traced to its source. Every age advantageously compares itself with its predecessor; for it has made some advances, and rarely suspects that the same triumph is reserved for its successor. But besides this illusion in regard to the style, which, like the manners of the time, is passing away, the veteran critic has long been a practised master, and, in the daring and dubious novelties which time has not consecrated, he must descend to a new pupilage: but his rigid habits are no longer flexible; and for the matured arbiter of literature, who tastes "the bitterness of novelty," what remains but an invective against the minting of new words and the versatility of new tastes?

The fallacy of the systematic critics arises from the principle, that a modern language is stationary and stable, like those which are emphatically called "the dead languages," in which every deviation unsupported by authority is legally condemned as a barbarism. But the truth is, that every modern language has always existed in fluctuation and change. The people themselves, indeed, are no innovators: their very phrases are traditional. Popular language can only convey the single uncompounded notions of the people: it is the style of facts, and they are intelligible to one another by the shortest means. Their Saxon-English is nearly monosyllabic, and their phraseology curt. Hence we find that the language of the mob in the year 1382 is precisely the natural style of the mob of this day.* But this popular style can

* These are political squibs thrown out by the mobocracy in the reign of Richard the Second They are preserved in Mr. Turner's "History of Eng-

never be set up as the standard of genius, which is mutable with its age, creating faculties and embodying thoughts which do not enter into the experience of the people, and therefore cannot exercise their understandings.

A series of facts will illustrate our principle, that the language of every literary people exists in a fluctuating condition, and that its vaunted purity and its continued stability are chimerical notions.

In this history of the viscissitudes of the English language, we may commence with our remote ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons. When their studies and their language received a literary character, they coveted great pomposity in their style. They interlarded their staves with Latin words; and, even in the reign of the Confessor, the French language was fashionable. "The affectation of the Anglo-Saxon literati was evidently tending to adulterate their language; and, even if the Conquest had not taken place, the purity of the English language would have been speedily destroyed by the admixture of a foreign vocabulary." * Thus early were we perilling our purity.

In 1387, John de Trevisa, translating the Latin Polychro-

land." I print them in their modern orthography. The first specimen runs in familiar rhymes:—

"Jack the Miller asked help to turn his mill aright. He hath ground small, small! The King's son of Heaven he shall pay for all. Look thy Mill go aright with the four sails, and the post stand in steadfastness. With Right and with Might, with Skill and with Will, let Might help Right, and Skill go before Will, and Right before Might, then goes our Mill aright; and if Might go before Right, and Will before Skill, then is our Mill mis adyght."

Now we have plain, intelligible prose:—

"Jack Carter prays you all that ye make a good end of that ye have begun, and do well, and still better and better; for, at the even, men near the day. If the end be well, then is all well. Let Piers the ploughman dwell at home, and dyght us corn. Look that Hobbe the robber be well chastised. Stand manly together in truth, and help the truth, and truth shall help you."

* Sir Francis Palgrave's "Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth;" Proofs and Illustrations, ccxiii.

nicon of Higden, tells us he avoids what he calls "the old and ancient English." A century afterwards, Caxton, printing this translation of Trevisa, had to rewrite it, to change the "rude and old English; that is, to wit, certain words which in these days be neither used nor understood." It might have startled Master Caxton to have suspected that he might be to us what Trevisa was to him; as it had equally amazed Trevisa, when he discovered archaisms which had contracted the rust of time, to have imagined that his fresher English were to be archaisms to his printer in the succeeding century.

At the period at which our present vernacular literature opened on us, Eliot, More, and Ascham maintained great simplicity of thought and idiom; yet even at this period, about 1550, the language seemed in imminent danger. It raised the tone of our primitive critics, and the terrors of neologism took all frightful shapes to their eyes.

A refined critic of our language then was the learned Sir JOHN CHEKE, who at this early period considered that the English language was capable of preserving the utmost purity of style, and he was jealously awake to its slightest violations. A friend of his, Sir THOMAS HOBY, a courtly translator of the "Courtier of Castiglione," had solicited his critical opinion. The learned Cheke, equally friendly and critical, insinuated his abhorrence of "an unknown word;" and apologizes for his corrections, lest he should be accounted "overstraight a deemer of things, by marring his handiwork." Hoby had evidently alarmed, by some sprinklings of Italianisms, some *capriccios* of "new-fangled" words, the chaste ear of our Anglican purist. I preserve this remarkable letter to serve as a singular specimen of our English, unpolluted even by a Latinism.*

* This letter to the translator Hoby has been passed over by those who collected the few letters of the learned CHEKE; and, what seems strange, appears only in the first edition of Hoby's translation, having been omitted in the subsequent editions. Perhaps the translator was not enamoured of his excellent critic.

"Our own tongue should be written *clean* and *pure*, unmixt and unmangled with borrowing of other tongues, wherein, if we take not heed, by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tongue naturally and praisably utter her meaning, when she borroweth no counterfeitness of other tongues to attire herself withal; but used plainly her own, with such shift as nature, craft, experience, and following of other excellent, doth lead her unto; and if she want at any time (as, being imperfect, she must), yet let her borrow with such bashfulness that it may appear, that if either the mould of our own tongue could serve us to fashion a word of our own, or if the old denizened words could content and ease this need, we would not boldly venture on unknown words. This I say, not for reproof of you, who have scarcely and necessarily used, where occasion seemeth, a strange word so, as it seemeth to grow out of the matter, and not to be sought for; but for my own defence, who might be counted overstraight a deemer of things, if I give not this account to you, my friend, of my marring this your handiwork."

Such was the tone even of our primitive critics. The terrors of neologism were always before their eyes. All those accessions of the future opulence of the vernacular language were either not foreseen, or utterly proscribed; while, at the same time, the wants and imperfections of the language, amid all its purity or its poverty, were felt and acknowledged. We perceive that even this stern champion of his vernacular idiom confesses that "he may want at time, being imperfect, and must borrow with bashfulness." The cries of the critics suddenly break on us. Another contemporary critic of not inferior authority laments that "there seemed to be no mother-tongue." "The far-journeyed gentlemen" returned home not only in love with foreign fashions, but equally fond "to powder their talk with over-sea language." There was French-English, and English Italianated. Professional men

disfigured the language by conventional pedantries; the finical courtier would prate "nothing but Chaucer." "The mystical wisemen and the poetical clerks delivered themselves in quaint proverbs and blind allegories."* The pedantic race, in their furious Latinisms, bristling with polysyllabic pomposity, deemed themselves fortunate when they could fall upon "dark words," which our critic aptly describes "catching an ink-horn term by the tail." The eloquence of the more volatile fluttered in the splendid patches of modern languages. It seemed as if there were to be no longer a native idiom, and the good grain was choked up by the intruding cockle which flourished by its side. Another contemporary critic announces that "our English tongue was a gallimaufry or hodge-podge of all other speeches." ARTHUR GOLDING grieves over the disjected members of the language:—

> "Our English tongue driven almost out of kind (nature),
> Dismembered, hacked, maimed, rent, and torn,
> Defaced, patched, marred, and made in scorn."

A critic who has left us "An Arte of English Poetry," written perhaps about 1550 or 1560, exhorting the poet to render his language (which, however, he never could in his own verses) "natural, pure, and the most usual of all his country," seemed at a loss where to fix on the standard of style. He would look to the court to be the modellers of speech; but there he acknowledges that "the preachers, the secretaries, and travellers" were great corrupters; and not less "our universities, where scholars use much peevish affectation of words out of the primitive languages." The coarse bran of our own native English was, however, to be sifted; but where was the genuine English idiom to be gathered? Our fastidious critic remonstrates against "the daily talk of northern men." The *good southern* was that "we of Middlesex or Surrey use." Middlesex and Surrey were then to regulate the idiom of all

* Sir Thomas Wilson's "Arte of Rhetoric," 1553.

British men! and all our England was doomed to barbarism, as it varied from "the usual speech of the court, and that of London within sixty miles, and not much above." But was our English more stable within this assigned circumference of the metropolis than any other line of demarcation? About 1580, CAREW informs us that "within these sixty years we have incorporated so many Latin and French words, as the third part of our language consisteth in them."

Some there were among us, who, alarmed that such ceaseless infusions were polluting the native springs of English, would look back with veneration and fondness on our ancient masters. Our great poet SPENSER,* then youthful, declared that the language of CHAUCER was the purest English; and our bard hailed, in a verse often quoted by the critics, —

"Dan Chaucer, well of English undefiled."

But in this well are deposited many waters. Chaucer has been accused of having enriched the language with the spoils of France, blending the old Saxon with the Norman-French and the modern Gallic of his day, for which he has been vehemently censured by the austerity of philological antiquaries. Skinner and his followers have condemned Chaucer for introducing "a wagon-load of words," and have proclaimed that Chaucer "wrote the language of no age;" a reproach which has been transferred to our Spenser himself, who has transplanted many an exotic into the English soil, and recast many an English word for the innocent forgery of a rhyme! So that two of the finest geniuses in our literature, for recasting the language, must lay their heads down to receive the heavy axe of verbal pedantry.

Descending a complete century, in 1656 we are surprised at discovering HEYLIN, at a period relatively modern, reiterat-

* Spenser's protest against the innovators of language may be seen in his "Three Letters," which are preserved unmutilated in Todd's "Spenser." They are deficient in Hughes's edition.

ing the language of his ancient predecessors. This latter critic published his animadversions on the pedantic writings of HAMON L'ESTRANGE, who had opened on us a floodgate of Latinisms. Heylin observes, "More French and Latin words have gained ground upon us since *the middle of Queen Elizabeth's reign* than were admitted by our ancestors, not only since the Norman, but the Roman conquest." This was written before the restoration of Charles the Second, when we were to be overrun by Gallicisms. This complaint did not cease with Heylin; for it has often been renewed. Heylin drew up in alphabetical order the uncouth and unusual words which are to be found in Hamon L'Estrange's "History;" and yet many of these foreigners, since the days of Heylin, have become denizens. So unsettled were the notions of our philology with regard to style, that L'Estrange could venture in his rejoinder, which contains sufficient vinaicre, as he writes it, a defence of these hard words, which is entertaining: "As to those lofty words, I declare to all the world this not uningenuous acknowledgment, that having conversed with authors of the noblest and chief remark in several languages, not only their notions, but their very words especially, being of the most elegant import, became at length so familiar with me, as, when I applied myself to this present work, I found it very difficult to renounce my former acquaintance with them; but as they freely offered themselves, so I entertained them upon these considerations. First, I was confident that among learned men they needed no other passe than their own extraction; and, for those who were mere English readers, I saw no reason they should wonder at them, considering that for their satisfaction I had sent along with every foreigner his interpreter, to serve instead of a dictionary." Hamon L'Estrange's "Life of Charles I." was certainly a piece of infelicitous pedantry, as we may judge by this specimen.*

* Heylin's "Observations on the Historie of the Reign of King Charles." L'Estrange's rejoinder may be found in the second edition of his History.

Even great authors glanced with a suspicious eye on these vicissitudes of language, not without a conviction that they themselves were personally interested in these uncertain novelties. It would seem as if Milton, from the new invasion of Gallic words and Gallic airiness which broke in at the Restoration, had formed some uneasy anticipations that his own learned diction and sublime form of poetry might suffer by the transition, and that Milton himself might become as obsolete as some of his great predecessors appeared to his age. The nephew of Milton, in the preface to his "Theatrum Poetarum," where the critical touch of the great master so frequently betrays itself, pleads for our ancient poets, who are not the less poetical because their style is antiquated. Writing in the reign of Charles II., in 1675, he says, "From Queen Elizabeth's reign, the language hath not been so unpolished as to render the poetry of that time ungrateful to such as at this day will take the pains to examine it well. If no poetry should please but what is calculated to every refinement of a language, of how ill consequence this would be for the future, let him consider, and make it his own case, who, being now in fair repute, shall, two or three ages hence, when the language comes to be double-refined, understand that his works are come obsolete and thrown aside. I cannot," he (perhaps Milton) continues,—"I cannot but look upon it as a very pleasant humor, that we should be so compliant with the French custom as to follow set fashions, not only in garments, but in music and poetry. For clothes, I leave them to the discretion of the modish: breeches and doublet will not fall under a metaphysical consideration. But in arts and sciences, as well as in moral notions, I shall not scruple to maintain, that what was *verum et bonum* once, continues to be so always. Now, whether the trunk-hose fancy of Queen Elizabeth's days, or the pantaloon genius of ours, be best, I shall not be hasty to determine."

Would we learn the true history of a modern language, we

must not apply to the CRITICS, who only press for conformity and appeal to precedents; but we must look to those other more practical dealers in words, the LEXICOGRAPHERS, who at once reveal to us all the incomings and outgoings of their great "exchequer of words." Turn over the prefaces of our elder lexicographers. Every one of them pretends to prune away the vocabulary of his predecessors, and to supply, in this mortality of words, those which live on the lips of contemporaries. In the great tome of his record of archaisms and neologisms, the gray moss hangs about the oak, and the graft shoots forth with fresh verdure. BARET, one of our earliest lexicographers, in the reign of Elizabeth, thus expresses himself: "I thought it not meete to stuffe this worke with old obsolete words, which, now a daies, no good writer will use."* Words spurned at by the lexicographer of 1580 had been consecrated by the venerable fathers of our literature and of the Reformation, not a century past; yet another century does not elapse when another dictionary throws all into confusion. HENRY COCKRAM, whose volume has been at least twelve times reprinted, boldly avows, that "what any before me in this kind have begun I have not only fully finished, but thoroughly perfected;" and, presuming on the privilege of "an interpreter of hard English words," the language is wrecked in a stormy pedantry of Latin and Greek terms, which, however, indicate that new corruption of our style which some writers and speakers, as Hamon L'Estrange, were attempting.† What a picture have we sketched of the

* "Alvearie, or quadruple Dictionary of Four Languages," 1580.

† "The English Dictionary, or an Interpreter of Hard English Words," by H. C., gent., 1658. The eleventh and twelfth editions are before me. The last, edited by another person, is not so copious as the former. In Cockram's own edition, we have a first "Book" of his "Hard Words," followed by a second of what he calls "Vulgar Words," which are English. The last editor has wholly omitted the second part. Of the first part, or the "Hard Words," Cockram observes that "they are the *choicest words now in* use, and wherewith our language is enriched and become so copious; to which words the common sense is annexed." — See note on this Dictionary, with some few specimens of its contents, in "Curiosities of Literature," vol. iii.

mortality of words, through all the fleeting stages of their decadency, from TREVISA to CAXTON, from CAXTON to BARET, from BARET to COCKRAM, and from COCKRAM to his numerous successors!

Thus, then, has our language been in perpetual movement; and that "purity of style," whose presumed violation has raised such reiterated querulousness, has, in reality, proved to be but a mocking phantom, fugitive or unsubstantial. Our English has often changed her dress to attract by new graces, and has spoken with more languages than one. She has even submitted to Fashion, that most encroaching usurper of words, who sends them no one knows how and no one knows why, banishing the old and establishing the new; and who has ever found her legitimacy unquestioned, when, in her matured age, we recognize Fashion under the consecrated name of CUSTOM.

But let us not quit this topic of "purity of style" without offering our sympathies for those who have suffered martyrdom in their chimerical devotion. In the days of my youth, there were some who would not write a word unwarranted by Swift or Tillotson: these were to be held fast for pure idiomatic prose, by those who felt insulted by the encumbering lexiphanicisms of the ponderous numerosity of Johnson; and recently a return to our Saxon words, diminutive in size, has been trumpeted in a set oration at the University of Glasgow by a noble personage. This taste is rife among critics of limited studies. Charles Fox, a fine genius who turned towards the pursuits of literature too late in life, was a severe sufferer, and purified his vocabulary with a scrupulosity unknown to any purist, so nervously apprehensive was this great man lest he should not write English. Addison, Bolingbroke, and Middleton were not of sufficient authority; for he would use no word which was not to be found in Dryden. Alas! what disappointments await the few who creep along their Saxon idiom, or who would pore on the free gracefulness

of Dryden as a dictionary of words and phrases! Could the chimerical purity, which these are in search of, be ever found, never would it lend enchantment to their page, should their taste be cold or their fancy feeble. The language of genius must be its own reflection, and the good fortune of authors must receive the stamp used in their own mint.

It happens with the destiny of words as in the destiny of empires. Men in their own days see only the beginnings of things, and more sensibly feel the inconvenience of that state of transition inflicted by innovation, in its first approaches often capricious, always empirical. These vicissitudes of language in their end were to produce a vernacular idiom more wealthy than our native indigence seemed to promise. All those vehement cries of the critics which we have brought together were but the sharp pangs and throes of a parturient language in the natural progress of a long-protracted birth.

A national idiom, in its mighty formation, struggling into its perfect existence, encumbered by the heavy mass in which it lies involved, resembles the creation of the lion of the Bard of Paradise, when —

> "Half appeared
> The tawny lion, PAWING TO GET FREE
> HIS HINDER PARTS."

DIALECTS.

DIALECTS reflect the general language diversified by localities.

A dialect is a variation in the pronunciation, and necessarily in the orthography of words, or a peculiarity of phrase or idiom, usually accompanied by a tone which seems to be as local as the word it utters. It is a language rarely understood out of the sphere of the population by whom it is appropriated. A language is fixed in a nation by a flourishing metropolis of an extensive empire; a dialect may have existed coeval with that predominant dialect which by accident has become the standard or general language; and, moreover, the contemned dialect may occasionally preserve some remains or fragments of the language, which, apparently lost, but hence recovered, enable us rightly to understand even the prevalent idiom.

All nations have had dialects. Greece had them, as France and Italy have them now. Homer could have included in a single verse four or five dialects; but, though the Doric and the Ionic were held the most classical, none of them were barbarous, since their finest writers have composed in these several dialects. Even some Italian poets and comic writers have adopted a favorite dialect; but no classical English author could have immortalized any one of our own.

Ancient Greece, as Mitford describes, "though a narrow country, was very much divided by mountains and politics." And mountains and politics, which impede the general intercourse of men, inevitably produce dialects. Each isolated state with fear or pride affected its independence, not only

by its own customs, but by its accent or its phrase. In France, the standard language was long but a dialect. There, potent nobles, each holding a separate court and sovereignty in his own province, offered many central points of attraction. The Counts of Foix, of Provence, and of Toulouse, and the Dukes of Guienne, of Normandy, and of Brétagne, were all munificent patrons of those who cultivated what they termed *l'art du beau parler*, each in their provincial idiom. These were all subdivisions of the two rival dialects to which the Romane language had given birth. But the river Loire ran between them; and a great river has often been the boundary of a dialect. France was thus long divided. On the south of the Loire, their speech was called the language of *Oc;* and on the north, the language of *Oïl*, — names which they derived from the different manner of the inhabitants pronouncing the affirmative *Oui*. The language of the poetical Troubadours on the south of the Loire had not the happier destiny of its rival, used by the Trouvères on the north. It was this which became the standard language, while the other remains a dialect. Here we have a remarkable incident in the history of dialects in a great country: it was long doubtful which was to become the national language; and it has happened, if we may trust an enthusiast of Languedoc, that his idiom, expressing with more vowelly softness and *naïveté* the familiar emotions of love and friendship, and gayety and *bonhomie*, gave way to a harsher idiom and a sharp nasal accent; and all ended by the Parisian detecting the provincials by their shibboleth, and calling them all alike Gascons, — and their taste for exaggeration and rhodomontade, gasconades; while the southerns, who hold that what is called the French language is only a perversion of their own dialect, like our former John Bull, fling on the Parisian the old Gaulish appellative of *Franchiman.**

* "Dictionnaire Languédocien-françois," par l'Abbé de Sauvages. "*Franchiman* est formé de l'Allemand, et signifie *homme de France.*" The

The dialects of England were produced by occurrences which have happened to no other nation. Our insular site has laid us open to so many masters, that it was long doubtful whether Britain would ever possess a uniform language. The aboriginal Britons left some of their words behind them in their flight, as the Romans had done in their dominion:* and even the visiting Phœnician may have dropped some words on our coasts. The Jutes, the Angles, and the Saxons brought in a new language, and, arriving from separate localities, that language came to us diversified by dialects; and the Danes, too, joined the northern brotherhood of pirate-kings who planted themselves in our soil. The gradual predominance of the West-Saxon over the petty kingdoms which subdivided Britain first approached to the formation of a national language. The West-Saxon was the land of Alfred; and the royal cultivation of its dialect, supreme in purity as the realm stood in power, rendered it the standard language which we now call Anglo-Saxon.

"Had the Heptarchy (Octarchy) continued," observed Bishop Percy, "our English language would probably have been as much distinguished for its dialects as the Greek, or at least as that of the several independent states of Italy." In truth, we remained much in that condition while a power hostile to the national character assumed the sovereignty. So unsettled was the English language, that a writer at the close of the fourteenth century tells us that different parts of the

abbé wrote in 1756, when he did not care to translate too literally: the Frank-man meant the *Free man*, for the Franks called themselves so, as "the free people." This learned Gascon, in his zeal for the *Langue d'oc*, explains, "*Parla Franchimas*" means "parler avec l'accent (bon ou mauvais) des provinces du nord du royaume;" an insinuation that the French accent might not be positively the better one. The good abbé had such a perfect conviction of the superiority of his Languedocians, that he would have no other servants, not only for their superior integrity, but for that of their language.

* "Palgrave," 174. They also received some in exchange; many words in Cæsar being British. — *Hearne's Leland's Itinerary*, vi.

island experienced a difficulty to understand one another. A diversity of pronunciation, as well as a diversity in the language, was so prevalent, that the Northern, the Southern, and the Middle-land men were unintelligible when they met: the Middle-land understood the Northern and the Southern better than the Northman and the Southman comprehended one another: the English people seemed to form an assemblage of distinct races. Even to this day, a scene almost similar might be exhibited. Should a peasant of the Yorkshire dales, and one from the vales of Taunton, and another from the hills of the Chiltern, meet together, they would require an interpreter to become intelligible to each other; but, in this dilemma, what county could produce the Englishman so versed in provincial dialects as to assist his three honest countrymen?

If etymology often furnishes a genealogy of words through all their authentic descents, so likewise a map of provincial idioms might be constructed to indicate the localities of the dialects. There we might observe how an expansive and lengthened river, or intervening fells and mountains which separate two counties, can stop the course of a dialect, so that the idiom current on one side, when it passes the borders becomes intrusive, little regarded, and, ere it reaches a third county, has expired in the passage. Thus the Parret, we are told, is the boundary of the Somersetshire dialect; for words used east of the Parret are only known by synonymes on the west side. The same incident occurs in Italy, where a single river runs through the level plain: there the Piedmontese peasant from the western end meeting with a Venetian from the eastern could hold but little colloquial intercourse together: a Genoese would be absolutely unintelligible to both; for, according to their proverb, "language was the gift of God, but the Genoese dialect was the invention of the Devil." In those rank dialects left to run to seed in their wild state, without any standard of literature, we hardly recognize the national idiom. The Italian language sprung from one common

source, — its maternal Latin; but this we might not suspect, should we decide solely by its dialects: and we may equally wonder how some of our own could ever have been mangled and distorted out of the fair dimensions of the language of England.

All who speak a dialect contract a particular intonation, which, almost as much as any local words, betrays their soil: these provincial tones are listened to from the cradle; and, as all dialects are of great antiquity, this sounding of the voice has been bequeathed from generation to generation.* It is sometimes a low muttering in the throat, a thick guttural like the Welsh, or a shrill nasal twang, or a cadence or chant: centuries appear not to have varied the tone more than the vocable. The romance of "Octavien Imperator," which was written possibly earlier than the reign of Henry VI., is in the Hampshire dialect nearly as it is spoken now. The speech of a Yorkshireman is energetically described by our ancient Trevisa. "It is so sharpe, slytting, frotyng, and unshape, that we sothern men maye unneth understond that language." As we advance in the North, the tones of the people are described as "round and sonorous, broad open vowels, and the richness and fulness of the diphthongs fill their mouths" with a firm, hardy speech.

A striking contrast is observable among those who by their secluded position have held little intercourse with their neighbors, and have contracted an overweening estimation of themselves, and a provincial pride in their customs, manners, and language. Norfolk, surrounded on three sides by the sea,

* In that very curious "Logonomia Anglica" of the learned Alexander Gill, — the father; for his son of the same name succeeded him as master of St. Paul's, — we have the orthoepy of our dialects given with great exactness. This work was produced about 1619, and we find the peculiar provincial pronunciation of the present day. A work so curious in the history of our vernacular tongue should not have been composed in Latin. Mr. Guest has carefully translated a judicious extract. — *History of English Rhythms*, ii. 204.

remains unaltered to this day, and still designates as "shiremen" all who are born out of Norfolk, not without "some little expression of contempt." There is "a narrowness and tenuity in their pronunciation," such as we may fancy — for it is but a fancy — would steal out of the lips of reserved, proudful men, and who, as their neighbors of Suffolk run their common talk into strange melancholy cadences, have characterized their peculiar intonation as "the Suffolk whine." In Derbyshire the pronunciation is broad, and they change the G into K. The Lancashire folk speak quick and curt, omit letters, or sound three or four words all together: thus *I wow'didd'n*, or *I woudyedd'd*, is a cacophony which stands for *I wish you would!* When the editor of a Devonshire dialect found that it was aspersed as the most uncouth jargon in England, he appealed to the Lancashire.*

But such vile rustic dissonance or mere balderdash concerns not our vernacular literature, though it seems that even such agrestic rubbish may have its utility in a provincial vocabulary; for the glossary to the "Exmoor language" was drawn up for the use of lawyers on the western circuit, who frequently mistook the evidence of a rustic witness for want of an interpretation of his words. Some ludicrous misconceptions of equivocal terms or some ridiculous phraseology have been recorded in other counties, among the judges and the bar at a county assize.

But it is among our provincial dialects that we discover many beautiful archaisms, scattered remnants of our language, which explain those obscurities of our more ancient writers, singularities of phrase, or lingual peculiarities, which have so often bewildered the most acute of our commentators. After all their voluminous research and their conjectural temerity,

* The late Dr. Valpy told me that Mr. Walker, the orthoepist, had so intimate a knowledge of the provincial peculiarities of pronunciation, that, in a private course of reading at Oxford with twelve undergraduates, he told each of them the respective place of their birth or early education.

a villager in Devonshire or in Suffolk, and, more than either, the remoter native of the North Countree, with their common speech, might have recovered the baffled commentators from their agony. The corrections of modern editors have often been discovered to be only ingenious corruptions of their own, whenever the original provincial idiom has started up.

These provincial modes of speech have often actually preserved for us the origin of English phraseology, and enlightened the philologist in a path unexplored. In one of the most original and most fanciful of the dramas of Ben Jonson, "the Sad Shepherd," the poet designed to appropriate a provincial dialect to the Witch Maudlin's family. He had consulted Lacy the comedian, who was a native of Yorkshire, respecting the northern phraseology. Unfortunately, this drama was never finished; and the consequence is, that the dialects are incorrectly given, and are worsened by the orthography of the printer. Yet it was from this imperfect attempt to convey some notion of our dialects that Horne Tooke was able to elucidate one of his grammatical discoveries in regard to the conjunction IF, which, from "the Sad Shepherd," is demonstrated to be anciently the imperative of the verb GIF, or give. Thus it was, by apparently very rude dialects, this famous philologist was enabled to substantiate beyond doubt a signification which had occurred to no one but himself.*

A language in the progress of its refinement loses as well as gains in the amount of words and the good fortune of expressive phrases. Some become equivocal by changing their signification, and some fall obsolete, one cannot tell why, for custom or caprice arbitrate, guided by no law, and often with an unmusical ear. These discarded but faithful servants, now treated as outcasts, and not even suspected to have any habitation, are safely lodged in some of our dialects. As the people are faithful traditionists, repeating the words of their

* Tooke's "Diversions of Purley," p. 141.

forefathers, and are the longest to preserve their customs, they are the most certain antiquaries; and their oral knowledge and their ancient observances often elucidate many an archæological obscurity. Hence two remarkable consequences have been discovered in the history of our popular idioms: many words and phrases used in the land of Cockney, now deemed not only vulgar, but ungrammatical, are, in fact, not corruptions of the native tongue, but the remains of what was anciently at different periods the established national dialect.* This transmitted language descended to the humbler classes, unimpaired and unaugmented, through a long line of ancestry. Again: it is often probable that the provincial word which in its pronunciation merely reverses the order of the letters, as now uttered, and which is only heard from the mouths of the people, may convey the original spoken sound, and be the genuine English. Are we quite sure that the polishers may not often have been the corrupters of our language? Nor let us be positive that the metropolitan taste has always fixed on the most felicitous or the most forcible of our idiomatic words or phrases, since we may discover some lingering among our provincial dialects which should never have been dismissed, and which claim to be restored. When JOHNSON compiled his "Dictionary," he was not aware of the authentic antiquity of our dialectic terms and phrases. Our literary antiquities had not yet engaged the attention of general scholars. Provincialisms were not deemed by the legislator of our language legitimate words: he did not recognize their primitive claims nor their relative affinities, but ejected them as vagabonds. But words are not barbarous nor obsolete because no longer used in our written composition,

* In "Anecdotes of the English Language," by Samuel Pegge, an antiquary, who called himself "an old modern," the reader will find several curious exemplifications of the vulgar dialect, sometimes fancifully, but often satisfactorily ascertained. It is amusing to detect what we call *vulgarisms* composing the language of Chaucer and Shakspeare, and even our Bibles and Liturgies.

since some of the most exquisite and picturesque, which have ceased to enrich our writings, live in immortal pages. After the issue of Johnson's great labor, our national literature began to attract the studies of literary men, who soon perceived how this neglected but existing stock of idiomatic English in our provincialisms more certainly explained our elder writers in verse and prose. Amid the murmurs raised by the archæologists, ASH attempted to supply the palpable deficiency of Johnson; but the matter was too abundant, and his space too contracted. In vain he attempted his "Supplement;" all the counties in England seemed to rise against the luckless glossarist: but, notwithstanding its limited utility, his vocabulary was often preferred for its copiousness to the more elaborate lexicon. The spirit of inquiry was now abroad after the "winged words;" and ingenious persons, within these twenty years,* have produced a number of pro-

* RAY was the first who collected "Local Words, *North Country* and *South* and *East Country*." "The Exmoor Scolding and Courtship" is an authentic specimen of the *Exmoor language*. The words were collected by a blind fiddler, and the dialogues were written by a clergyman with the fiddler's assistance, before 1725. We have a glossary of Lancashire words and phrases, contained in the humorous works of Tim Bobbin. Other county glossarists have appeared within the last fifteen years, — BROCKETT's "North Country Words;" "Suffolk Words and Phrases," by Major MOOR; Mr. ROGER WILBRAHAM's "Attempt at a Glossary of Cheshire Words;" Mr. JENNINGS's "Dialect of the West of England," particularly the Somersetshire words; Mr. BRITTON on those of Wiltshire; and the Rev. JOSEPH HUNTER has given "the Hallamshire Glossary," to which are appended "Words used in Halifax," by the Rev. JOHN WATSON, and also an addition to the "Yorkshire Words," by THORESBY, the Leeds antiquary.

An investigation of the origin, nature, and history of DIALECTS was proposed by the late Dr. BOUCHER for a complete glossary of all the dialects of the kingdom. But these precious stores, not only of the vocables, but of the domestic history of England, — its manners, occupations, amusements, diet, dress, buildings, and other miscellaneous topics, — rich in all the affluence of the laborious readings of more years than the siege of Troy, was but bread cast away on the waters, and was never given to the public for want of public support. After the author's death, two eminent editors zealously resumed the work, which was already prepared; but the public remained so little instructed of its value, it suddenly ceased! Works of national utility should

vincial glossaries; but several are still wanting, particularly those of Kent and Sussex and Hampshire. All these glossaries collected together might form a provincial lexicon marking each county. A few might be allowed to enter into the great dictionary of the English language: but that would not be their safest place; for they would then lie at the mercy of successive editors, who would not always discern a precious archaism amid the baseness and corruption of language. The origin, the nature, and the history of our provincial idioms have yet never been investigated, though the subject, freed from its mere barbarisms, opens a diversified field to the philosopher, the antiquary, and the philologist.

Grose, who wrote in 1785, notices the state of those counties which were remote from the metropolis, or which had no immediate intercourse with it before "newspapers and stage-coaches imported scepticism, and made every ploughman and thresher a politician and a freethinker." The accelerated intercourse of the people has long passed beyond the diurnal folio and the evanescent stage-coach; and, in a century of railroads and national schools, the provincial glossary will finally vanish away.

be consecrated as national property; and means should be always ready to avert such a calamity to the literature of England, and to the information of Englishmen, as was the suppression of the labors of BOUCHER.

MANDEVILLE, OUR FIRST TRAVELLER.

MANDEVILLE was the Bruce of the fourteenth century, as often calumniated, and even ridiculed. The most ingenuous of voyagers has been condemned as an idle fabulist; the most cautious, as credulous to fatuity; and the volume of a genuine writer, which has been translated into every European language, has been formally ejected from the collection of authentic travels. His truest vindication will be found by comprehending him; and, to be acquainted with his character, we must seek for him in his own age.

At a period when Europe could hardly boast of three leisurely wayfarers stealing over the face of the universe; when the Orient still remained but a Land of Faery, and "the map of the world" was yet unfinished; at a time when it required a whole life to traverse a space which three years might now terminate, — Sir JOHN MANDEVILLE set forth to enter unheard-of regions. Returning home after an absence of more than thirty years, he discovered a "mervayle" strange as those which he loved to record, — that he was utterly forgotten by his friends!

He had returned "maugre himself;" for four and thirty years had not satiated his curiosity. His noble career had submitted to ordinary infirmities, — to gout and the aching of his limbs: these, he lamentably tells, had "defined the end of my labor against my will, God knoweth." The knight in this pilgrimage of life seems to have contracted a duty with God, that while he had breath he should peregrinate, and, having nothing to do at home, be honorable in his generation by his enterprise over the whole earth; and earnestly he prays "to

all the *readers* and *hearers* of my book" (for "hearers" were then more numerous than "readers") "to say for him a *Pater-Noster* with an *Ave-Maria*." He wrote for "solace in his wretched rest;" but the old passion, the devotion of his soul, finally triumphed over all arthritic pangs. The globe evidently was his true home; and thus Liege, and not London, received the bones of an unwearied traveller, whose thoughts were ever passing beyond the equator.

With us, to whom an excursion to "the Londe of Promyssioun or of Behest" has sometimes arisen out of a morning engagement; we, who, impelled by steam, go "whither we list," with those billets which might serve as letters of recommendation in the steppes of Tartary,—we may wonder how our knight, who would not win his way by the arts of commerce, like his predecessor Marco Polo, bore up his chivalry; for, in his traversing, he had nothing to offer but his honorable sword, and probably his medical science, which might be sometimes as perilous. But difficulties insuperable to us could not enter into the emotions, nor were they the accidents, which impeded the traveller, "who on the day of St. Michael, in the year of our Lord 1322, passed the sea, and went the way to Hierusalem, and to behold the mervayles of Inde." A deep religious emotion, an obscure indefinite curiosity, and a courageous decision to wander wherever the step of man could press on the globe, to tell the world "the mervayles" it unconsciously holds within its orb, were the inspiration of a journey which stood next in solemnity to a departure to the world of spirits. Sir John had prepared himself; for he was learned, not only in languages, but in authentic romance and in romantic history: and he honestly resolved to tell all "the mervayles" which he had seen, and those which he had not; and these last were not the least.

Sir John Mandeville's probity remains unimpeached; for the accuracy of whatever he relates from his own personal observation has been confirmed by subsequent travellers. On

his return to Europe, he hastened to Rome to submit his book to the pope, and to "his wise council," and "those learned men of all nations who dwell at that court." The volume was critically reviewed; and his holiness "ratified and confirmed my book in all points" by referring to an account in Latin: this account was probably written by some missionary, — Rubriquis had been despatched on an unsuccessful mission to Christianize the great Khan of Tartary in 1230; or it was the writings of Marco Polo, which could not be unknown at Rome. In that day, all real information was consigned to the fugitive manuscript, partially known, and often subject to the interpolations and capricious alterations of its possessor; and, what sometimes occurred, to the silent plagiarisms of other writers, of which even Mandeville himself has been suspected.

The pope decreed that not only all that Mandeville related was veracious, but that the Latin book which his holiness possessed contained *much more*, and from whence the Mappa Mundi had been made. Indeed, Mandeville has himself told us that he wrote only from his recollections, as they "would come into his mind:" these, necessarily, were often broken and obscure. Some "mervayles" remained unrecorded, and hereafter were to be "more plainly told;" but I fear these are lost for us.

In this "true" book, we find many things very untrue; but we may doubt whether any in that day were as positive in this opinion. The author himself designed no imposition on his readers: he tells us what he believed, part of which he had seen, and the rest he had heard, and sometimes had transcribed from sources deemed by him authentic. Who can suspect the knight of spotless honor, and whose piety would not relinquish his *Ave-Marias* for a dominion? Having fought during two years under the ensign of the Sultan of Egypt, and being offered in marriage the sultan's daughter and a province, he refused both, when his Christianity was to be exchanged for Mahometanism.

This was a period when the marvellous never weakened the authenticity of a tale. The mighty tome of Pliny, that awful repository of all the errors of antiquity, and other writers of equal name, detail prodigies and legends, and so do the Fathers. Who would not have rejoiced to transcribe Pliny or St. Austen? Who imagined that all the delectable adventures of the romances, over which they passed many a dreamy day, with the very names of the personages and the very places where they occurred, were solely chimeras of the brain? The learned Mandeville was evidently not one of these sceptics; for he observes, that "the trees of the sun and of the moon are well known to have spoken to King Alisaundre, and warned him of his death." The unquestioned fact is in that famed romance; and others might be referred to, if we required additional authority. I have read of these talking-trees of the sun and moon in *Guarino detto il Meschino*, who lived a year among them to learn his own genealogy, and then was graceless enough to laugh at these timber-oracles. Mandeville forgot not in the Island of Lango, not distant from Crete, the legend of the unfortunate "Lady of the Land," who remained a dragoness because no one had the hardihood to kiss her lips to disenchant her. He tells likewise of the Faery Lady who guarded the sparrow-hawk: whoever ventured to assist that lady during three days and nights was rewarded by the boon of having whatever he wished. A king, who, not wanting any thing, had the audacity to wish to have the lady herself, was fairly warned that he did not know what he asked, as happens to the reckless; but, persisting in his absolute will, he incurred the curse of perpetual war to the last of his race!

We trace such tales among the romances, with all their circumstances; and some may have reached the listener from the Arabian tale-teller. The monsters he describes, Mandeville never invented: these, human and animal, he gave, as some of his predecessors had done, from Pliny or Ælian or

Ctesias,* who have sent them down to be engraven in the Great Nuremberg Chronicle, and adorned in the immortal page of Shakspeare. Marco Polo had noticed that portentous bird which could lift an elephant by its claws: he does not tell us that he had seen any bird of this wing; but we all know where it is to be found,—in the Arabian Tales! Sir Thomas Browne accuses Mandeville of *confirming* the fabulous accounts of India by Ctesias: but, in truth, our knight does not "confirm these refuted notions of antiquity;" he only repeats them, with the prelude of "men seyn." No one was more honest than Mandeville; for, when he had to describe the locality of paradise, he fairly acknowledges that "he cannot speak of it properly, for I was not there; it is far beyond: but, as I have *heard say* of wise men, it is on the highest part of the earth, nigh to the circle of the moon." However, he has contrived to describe the wall, which is not of stone, but of moss, with but a single entrance, "closed with brennynge fyre;" and though no mortal could enter, yet it was known that there was a well in paradise, whence flowed the four floods that run through the earth. "Wise men," he tells us, said this; some of these "wise men" were the Rabbins: and, three centuries afterwards, the accounts of paradise, by a finer genius than Mandeville, the illustrious Rawleigh, remained much the same.

To explain some of those incredible incidents which occurred to the author himself might exercise some critical ingenuity. Mandeville's adventure in "the Valley Perilous,"

* CTESIAS, a physician in high repute at the Persian court, and often referred to by Diodorus. He has been universally condemned as a fabulous writer, to which charge his description of some animals was liable. But a naturalist of the highest order, the famous CUVIER, has perhaps done an act of justice to this fabricator of animals. Ctesias reported the mythological creations which he had witnessed in hieroglyphical representations as actual living animals. It is glorious to remove from the darkened name of a writer, unjustly condemned, the obloquy of two thousand years. — *Theory of the Earth*, translated by Professor Jameson, 76.

when he saw the Devil's head with eyes of flame, great plenty of gold and silver, which he was too frightened to touch, and, moreover, a multitude of dead bodies, as if a battle had been fought there, might probably be resolved into some volcanic eruption, the rest supplied by his own horrifying imagination: for he tells, with great simplicity, "I was more devout then than ever I was before or after, and all for the dread of fiends that *I saw in divers figures;*" that is, at the *shapes* of the disparted rocks. The travellers were beaten down by tempests, winds, and thunder, which raged in this pent-up vale. As he marks the locality, the spot may yet be ascertained.

There was no imposition practised in all such legends; it is we who are startled by the supernatural in a personal narrative: but, in the fourteenth century, the more wonderful the tale, the more authentic it appeared, as it sunk into the softest and richest moulds of the most germinating imagination. The readers or the hearers were as well prepared to believe, as the writers prompt to gather up, their fictions. Collections of "Mirabilia Mundi," "Wonders," were a fashionable title applied to any single country, as well as to the world, — to England or Ireland, to the Holy Land or the Indies. The "Mirabilia" might be the running-title for a whole system of geography. The age of imagination has long been unfurnished of all its ingenious garniture, and yet we still catch at some evanescent hour of fancy susceptible of those ancient delights. We have lost something for which we have no substitute. Would not the modern novelist rejoice in the privilege of intermingling supernatural inventions to break the level of his every-day incidents and his trivial passions so soon forgotten? But that glowing day has set, leaving none of its ethereal hues in our cold twilight. Mandeville may still be read for those wild arabesques which so long unjustly proved fatal to his authentic narrative. His simplicity often warrants its truth: he assures us that Jerusalem is placed in the middle of the earth, because when he stuck his staff in the

ground, exactly at noon, it cast no shadow; and, having ascertained the spherical form of the globe, he marvels how the antipodes, whose feet are right upwards towards us, yet do not fall into the firmament! When he describes the elegant ornaments of "a vine made of gold that goeth all about the hall, with many bunches of grapes, some white, and the red made of rubies," he tells what he had seen in some divan; but when he records that "the emperor hath in his chamber a pillar of gold, in which is a ruby and carbuncle a foot long, which lighteth all his chamber by night," it may be questioned whether this carbuncle be any thing more than an Arabian fancy, a tale to which he had listened. Some of his ocular marvels have been confirmed by no questionable authority. Mandeville's description of a magical exhibition before the Khan of Tartary is a remarkable instance of the strange optical illusions of the scenical art, and the adroitness of the Indian jugglers: a similar scene appears in a recent version of the autobiography of the Emperor Akber. What seemed the spells of magic to the Europeans of that age, and of which some marvellous descriptions were brought to Europe by the crusaders or the pilgrims, and embellished the romances, our exquisite masks and our grand pantomimes have realized. Three centuries were to elapse ere the court of England could rival the necromancy of the court of Tartary.

Mandeville first composed his travels in the Latin language, which he afterwards translated into French, and lastly out of French into English, that "every man of my nation may understand it." We see the progressive estimation of the languages by this curious statement which Mandeville has himself given. The author first secured the existence of his work in a language familiar to the whole European world; the French was addressed to the politer circles of society; and the last language the author cared about was the vernacular idiom, which, at that time the least regarded, required all the patriotism of the writer in this devotion of his pen.

Copies of these travels were multiplied till they almost equalled in number those of the Scriptures. Now we may smile at the "mervayles" of the fourteenth century and of Mandeville; but it was the spirit of these intrepid and credulous minds which has marched us through the universe. To the children of imagination perhaps we owe the circumnavigation of the globe and the universal intercourse of nations.*

* Of modern editions of Mandeville's "Travels in England," that of 1725, printed by Bowyer, is a large octavo. There are numerous manuscripts of Mandeville in existence. An edition collated might discover either omissions or interpolations. This might serve as the labor of an amateur. Mandeville has not had the fortune of his predecessor, Marco Polo, to have met with a Marsden, learned in geographical and literary illustration.

Long subsequently to the time that this article was written, this edition of 1725 has been reprinted, with the advantage of a bibliographical introduction by Mr. Halliwell, and a collation of texts. [It was published in 1839, in an octavo volume of 326 pages, with illustrative engravings from manuscripts and printed books.]

CHAUCER.

In the chronology of our poetical collectors, Gower takes precedence of Chaucer unjustly; for Chaucer had composed many of his works in the only language which he has written, before the elder claimed the honors of an English vernacular poet, and probably then only emulating the success of him who first set the glorious example. Nor less in the rank of poetry must Chaucer hold the precedence. The first true English poet is Chaucer; and, notwithstanding that the rhythmical cadences of his unequal metre are now lost for us, Chaucer is the first modeller of the heroic couplet and other varieties of English versification. By the felicity of his poetic character, Chaucer was not only the parent but the master of those two schools of poetry which still divide its votaries by an idle rivalry, and which have been traced, like our architecture, the one to a Gothic origin, and the other to a classical model.

The personal history of Chaucer, poetical and political, might have been susceptible of considerable development, had the poet himself written it; for his biographers had no life to record. Speght, one of the early editors, in the good method of that day, having set down a variety of heads, including all that we might wish to know of any man, — when this methodizer of commonplaces came to fill up these well-planned divisions concerning Chaucer, he could only disprove what was accepted, and supply only what is uncertain. The "Life of Chaucer" by Godwin is a theoretical life; and, as much as relates to Chaucer himself, a single fatal fact, when

all was finished, dispersed the baseless vision.* The whole rested on the unauthenticated and contradictory statements of Leland, who, writing a century after the times of Chaucer, hastily collected unsubstantial traditions, and, what was less pardonable in Leland, fell into some anachronisms.

This defective chronology in the life of the poet has involved the more important subject of the chronology of his works. Posterity may be little concerned in the dates of his birth and his burial, his unknown parentage, his descriptive name, and, above all, his suspicious shield, which the heralds opined must have been blazoned out of the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth propositions of the first book of Euclid, from the poet's love of geometry, or, more obviously, from having no coat-of-arms to show of "far more ancient antiquity." But posterity would have been interested in the history of the genius of Chaucer, who, having long paced in a lengthened circuit of verbal version and servile imitation, passed through some remarkable transitions, kindling the cold ashes of translation into the fire of invention; from cloudy allegory breaking forth into the sunshine of the loveliest landscape-painting; and from the amatory romance gliding into that vein of humor and satire which in his old age poured forth a new creation. All this he might himself have told, or Gower might have revealed, had the elder bard, who lauded

* After Godwin had sent to press his biography of Chaucer, a deposition on the poet's age in the Herald's College detected the whole erroneous arrangement: as the edifice so ingeniously constructed had fallen on the aerial architect, he alleged truly that the deposition "contradicted the received accounts of all the biographers;" in fact, they had repeated original misstatements. The appendix, therefore, to the history of this modern biographer stands as a perpetual witness against its authenticity: there are some histories to which an appendix might prove to be as fatal. In this dilemma, our bold sophist was "absurd and uncharitable enough" to add one more conjecture to his "Life of Chaucer," — that "the poet, from a motive of vanity, had been induced *to state on oath* that he was about forty, when, in truth, he was fifty-eight!" — *Hippisley's Chapters on Early English Literature*, 85.

the lays and "ditties" of the youth of "the Clerk of Venus," loved him as well in his old age. But elegant literature, as distinguished from scholastic, was then without price or reward. The few men of genius who have written at this early period are only known to us by their writings; and probably were more known to their contemporaries by the station which they may have occupied, than by that which they maintain with posterity.

By royal patents and grants to the poet, we trace his early life at court, his various appointments, and his honorable missions to Genoa and to France; we must not add as confidently his visit to Petrarch.

Chaucer, in his political life, was bound up with the party of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; and, by a congenial spirit, with the novel doctrines of his friend, Dr. Wickliffe. The sister of his lady finally became the third Duchess of Lancaster, and the family alliance strengthened the political bond. How the Lancastrian exploded in the poet, something we know, but little we comprehend; and those who have attempted to lift the veil have not congratulated themselves on their success. The poet himself has not intrusted his secret to posterity, except, as is usual with poets, by eloquent lamentations. The exposition of a political transaction is never without some valued results; and, though deprived of names and dates, we are not without some dim lights: the palpable truth may not be obvious, but it may happen that we may stumble on it.

Chaucer himself has stated, "In *my youth* I was drawn in to be assenting to certain *conjurations* and other *great matters of ruling of citizens;* and those things have been my *drawers-in and exciters* in the matters *so painted and colored*, that *first* to me seemed then *noble and glorious for all the people.*"

Here the tale is plain, for this is the language of one who early in life had engaged in some popular scheme; and these early indications of the temper of the Wickliffite or the

Lancastrian, or both, had subsequently led to some more perilous attempts. They were, like all reforms, something "noble and glorious for the people;" and, as sometimes happens among reformers, what *at first* appeared to promise so well, ended in disappointment, and "penance in a dark prison."

The locality of this patriotic act was the city of London. He alludes to "free elections by great clamors of much people, for great disease of misgovernment in the hands of *torcentious citizens.*" When the fatal day arrived that he openly joined with a party for "the people," against those citizens whom he has so awfully denounced, it is evident, though we have no means to discriminate factions in an age of factions,* that he and his "conjurors" discovered that "all the people" were not of one mind. This votary or this victim of reform suddenly flings his contempt at "the hatred of the mighty senators of London or of its commonalty," and closes with a painful remembrance of "the janglings of THE SHEEPY PEOPLE"! The style of Chaucer bears the stamp of passionate emotions; words of dimension, or of poignant sarcasm. The "torcentious citizens" is an awful bolt, and "the sheepy people" is sufficiently picturesque.

In dismay the whole party took flight. Chaucer, in Zealand, exhausted his means to supply the wants of his political associates, till he himself found that even the partnership of common misery does not always preserve men from ingratitude. Returning home, potent persecutors cast him into a

* It has been alleged by more than one writer, that this mysterious affair relates to the election for the mayoralty of John of Northampton, a Wickliffite and a Lancastrian; but Mr. Turner, whose researches are on a more extended scale than any of his predecessors, truly observes, that "there are other periods besides the one usually selected to which the personal evils which Chaucer complains of are applicable." — *Hist. of England*, v. 296. It is as likely to have occurred when Nicholas Brambre, a confidential partisan of government in the city, appointed to the mayoralty by his party, caught "the freemen" by ambushes of armed men, and turned the Guildhall into a fortress. At such a time, "free elections" might have been considered by Chaucer as something "noble and glorious for all the people."

dungeon. Was the Duke of Lancaster absent, or the Duke of Gloucester in power? Let us observe, that in all these dark events the loyalty of the poet is never impeached; for Chaucer enjoyed without interruption the favor of both his sovereigns, Edward III. and Richard II.; and we discover that once, when dismissed from office, Richard allowed him to serve by deputy, which was evidence that Chaucer had never been dismissed by the king himself. The whole transaction, whatever it was, was a political movement between two factions. Chaucer, indeed, pleads that whatever he had done was under the control of others, himself being but "the servant of his sovereign." At that period, the factions in the state were more potent than the monarch. In the convulsive administration of a youthful prince, they who oppose the court are not necessarily opposing the sovereign.

It was behind the bars of a gloomy window in the Tower, where "every hour appeared to be a hundred winters," that Chaucer, recent from exile and sore from persecution, was reminded of a work popular in those days, and which had been composed in a dungeon, — "The Consolations of Philosophy," by Boethius, — and which he himself had formerly translated. He composed his "TESTAMENT OF LOVE," substituting for the severity of an abstract being the more genial inspiration of love itself. But the fiction was a reality, and the griefs were deeper than the fancies. In this chronicle of the heart, the poet mourns over "the delicious hours he was wont to enjoy," of his "richesse," and now of his destitution, the vain regret of his abused confidence, the treachery of all that "summer-brood" who never approach the lost friend in "the winter hour" of an iron solitude. The poet energetically describes his condition: there he sate "witless, thoughtful; and sightless, looking." This work the poet has composed in prose: but, in the leisure of a prison, the diction became more poetical in thoughts and in words than the language at that time had yet attained to; and, for those

who read the black-letter, it still retains its impressive eloquence.

But this apology which Chaucer has left of his conduct in this political transaction has incurred a fatal censure. "Never," observes Mr. Campbell, "was an obscure affair conveyed in a more obscure apology." His political integrity has been freely suspected. Chaucer has even been struck by the brilliant arrow of the Viscount de Chateaubriand. "Courtisan, Lancastrien, Wickliffist, infidèle à ses convictions, traitre à son parti, tantôt banni, tantôt voyageur, tantôt en faveur, tantôt en disgrace." No, thou eloquent Gaul! Chaucer never was out of favor, however he may have been more than once dismissed from his office; nor can we know whether the poet was ever "infidèle à ses convictions."

Obscure must ever remain the tale of justification in a political transaction which terminated on the part of the apologist by revealing "disclosures for the peace of the kingdom," denied by those whom they implicated, though their truth was offered to be maintained by the accuser, in the custom of the times, by single combat; and by confessions which acknowledge errors of judgment, but not of intention; and by penitence, which, if the patriot designed what was "glorious to all the people," he should never have repented of.

This obscure apology conceals the agony of conflicting emotions, — indignation at ungrateful associates, and a base desertion of ancient friends, who were plotting against him. Whether Chaucer was desirous of burying in obscurity a story of torturous details, or one too involved in confused motives for any man to tell with the precision of a simple statement, we know of no evidence which can enable us to decide with any certainty on an affair which no one pretends to understand. Chaucer might have been the scapegoat of the sovereign, or the champion of the people. We can rather decide on his calamity than his conduct. Many are the causes which may dissolve the bonds of faithless "conjurations;" and

it is not always he who abandons a party who is to be criminated by political tergiversation.

The circumstances of Chaucer's life had combined with his versatile powers. He had mingled with the world's affairs both at home and abroad: accomplished in manners, and intimately connected with a splendid court, Chaucer was at once the philosopher who had surveyed mankind in their widest sphere, the poet who haunted the solitudes of Nature, and the elegant courtier whose opulent tastes are often discovered in the graceful pomp of his descriptions. It was no inferior combination of observation and sympathy which could bring together into one company the many-colored conditions and professions of society, delineated with pictorial force, and dramatized by poetic conception, reflecting themselves in the tale which seemed most congruous to their humors. The perfect identity of these assembled characters, after the lapse of near five centuries, makes us familiar with the domestic habits and modes of thinking of a most interesting period in our country, not inspected by the narrow details of the antiquarian microscope, but in the broad mirror reflecting that truth or satire which alone could have discriminated the passions, the pursuits, and the foibles of society. Thus the painter of Nature, who caught the glow of her skies and her earth in his landscape, was also the miniature portrayer of human likenesses. When Chaucer wrote, the classics of antiquity were imperfectly known in this country, — the Grecian Muse had never reached our shores: this was probably favorable to the native freedom of Chaucer. The English poet might have lost his raciness by a cold imitation of the Latin masters: among the Italians, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, Chaucer found only models to emulate or to surpass. Hence the English bard indulged that more congenial abundance of thoughts and images which owns no other rule than the pleasure it yields in the profusion of nature and fancy. A great poet may not be the less Homeric because he has never read Homer.

Nature, in her distinct forms, lies open before this poet-painter: his creative eye pursued her through all her mutability; but in his details he was a close copier. In his rural scenery, there is a freshness in its luxuriance; for his impressions were stamped by their locality. This locality is so remarkable, that Pope had a notion, which he said no one else had observed, that Chaucer always described real places to compliment the owners of particular gardens and fine buildings. Let us join him in his walks —

> "When that the misty vapour was agone,
> And clear and fair was the morning;
> The dews, like silver, shining
> Upon the leaves."

The flowers sparkle in "their divers hues" — he sometimes counts their colors, "white, blue, yellow, and red" — on their stalks, spreading their leaves in breadth against the sun, gold-burned. His grass is "so small, so thick, so fresh of hue!" The poet goes by a river whose water is "clear as beryl or crystal;" turning into "a little way towards a park in compass round, and by a small gate: —

> "Whoso that would freely might gone (go)
> Into this Park walled with green stone."

The owner of that park, probably, was startled when he came to "the little way" and to "the small gate." This was either the park of some great personage, or possibly Woodstock Park, where stood a stone lodge, so long known by the name of "Chaucer's House," that, in the days of Elizabeth, it was still described as such in the royal grant. If poets have rarely built houses, at least their names have consecrated many.

His —

> "Garden upon a river in a green mead,
> The gravel gold, the water pure as glass," —

and "the eglantine and sycamore arbor, so thickly woven, where the priers who stood without all day could not discover

whether any one was within," was assuredly some particular garden. The stately grove has all the characters of its trees, — the oak, the ash, and the fir, — to "the fresh hawthorn," —

"Which in white motley that so swote doth smell."

In all these lovely scenes, there was a delicious sense of joyous existence: the inmates of the forest burst forth, from "the little conies, the beasts of gentle kind," to "the dreadful roe and the buck," and from their green leaves they who "with voice of angels" entranced the poet-musician: —

"So loud they sang, that all the woodés rung
Like as it should shiver in pieces small;
And as methought that the Nightingale
With so great might her voice out-wrest,
Right as her heart for love would brest (burst)."

So true is the accidental remark of the celebrated Charles Fox, that, "of all poets, Chaucer seems to have been the fondest of the singing of birds." These were the peculiar delights in the poetic habits of Chaucer, who was an early riser, and often mused on many a rondel, in gardens and meads and woods, at earliest dawn. This poet's sunrisings are the most exhilarating in our poetry.

We may doubt if the vernal scenes of Chaucer can be partaken by his more chilly posterity. Did England, in the seasons of Chaucer, flourish with a more genial May and a more refulgent June? or should we suspect that the travelled poet clothed our soil with the luxuriance of Provençal fancy, and borrowed the clear azure of Italy to soften the British roughness even of our skies?

Tyrwhit, the able commentator of Chaucer, has thrown out an incidental remark, which seems equally refined and true: "Chaucer in his serious pieces often follows his author with the servility of a mere translator; and, in consequence, his narration is jejune and constrained (as often appears in the 'Romaunt of the Rose' and his translations of Dante); whereas in the comic he is generally satisfied with borrowing

a slight hint of his subject, which he varies, enlarges, and embellishes at pleasure, and gives the whole the air and color of an original; a sure sign that his genius rather led him to compositions of the latter kind."

This remark is an instance of critical sagacity. The creative faculty in Chaucer had not broken forth in his translations, which evidently were his earliest writings. The native bent of his genius, the hilarity of his temper, betrays itself by playful strokes of raillery and concealed satire when least expected. His fine irony may have sometimes left his commendations, or even the objects of his admiration, in a very ambiguous condition. The learned editor of the second part of the "Paston Letters" hence has been induced to infer, that the spirit of chivalry, from the reign of the third Edward, had entirely declined, and only existed in the forms of conventional and fashionable society, and had sunk into a mere foppery, a system of forms and etiquettes, because Chaucer, a court-poet, treats with irony the chivalric manners. Whether this ingenious inference will hold with literary antiquaries, I will not decide; but I am inclined to suspect that Chaucer's indulgence of his taste for irony was not in the mind of this learned editor. Our poet has stamped with his immortal ridicule the tale told in his own person, "the Rime of Sir Thopas," which is considered as a burlesque of the metrical romances. In those days, there was an inundation of these romances, as "the thirst and hunger" of the present is accommodated with as spurious a brood. We have our "drafty prose" as they had their "drafty riming." But shall we infer from this ludicrous effusion of the great poet, that he held so light the venerable fablers, the ancient romancers, with whose "better parts" he had nourished his own genius? This is his own confession. Often in his years of grief, when the poet wondered —

"How he lived; for, day ne night,
I may not sleep, —
Sitting upright in my bed," —

then it was that he prescribed for his "secret sorrows" that medicine, which, "drunk deeply," makes us forget ourselves. In those hours the poet —

> "Bade one reach me a Boke,
> A Romance; and he it me took
> To read, and drive the Night away:
> For methought it better play
> Than play either at Chess or Tables."

And assuredly Chaucer found many passages in the old fablers not less entrancing than some of his own. Our poet indulged this vein of playful irony on persons as well as on things. A sly panegyric, sufficiently ambiguous for us to accept as a refined stroke, we find on the abstruse and interminable question of predestination; on which the Nonne's priest declares, —

> "But I ne cannot boult it to the bren,
> As can the holy doctor Augustín,
> Or Bœcé, or *the bishop Bradwardin*."

As this bishop, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, was the first who treated theology on mathematical principles, and likewise wrote on the "Quadrature of the Circle," we may presume "Bishop Bradwardin" rather perplexed the poet. Chaucer discovers his ironical manner when gravely stating the different theories of dreaming: —

> "What causeth Suevenes *
> On the morrow or on evens?"

He playfully concludes, and modern philosophy could no better assist the inquiry: —

> "Whoso of these Miracles
> The causes know bet † than I,
> Define he; for I certainly
> Ne can them not, ne never thinke
> To busie my witte for to swinke
> To know why this is more than that is,

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* Dreams. † Better.

Well worthé of this thing Clerkés,
That treaten of this and of other werkés,
For I, of none opinion
Nil."

It is with the same pleasantry he avoids all commonplace descriptions by playfully suggesting his pretended unskilfulness for the detail, or his want of learning:—

"Me list not of the chaf, ne of the stre,
Maken so long a tale, as of the corn."
Man of Lawe's Tale.

Yet humor and irony are not his only excellences; for those who study Chaucer know that this great poet has thoughts that dissolve in tenderness; no one has more skilfully touched the more hidden springs of the heart.

The herculean labor of CHAUCER was the creation of a new style. In this he was as fortunate as he was likewise unhappy. He mingled, with the native rudeness of our English, words of Provençal fancy, and some of French and of Latin growth. He banished the superannuated and the uncouth, and softened the churlish nature of our hard Anglo-Saxon; but the poet had nearly endangered the novel diction when his artificial pedantry assumed what he called "the ornate style" in "the Romaunt of the Rose" and in his "Troilus and Cressida." This "ornate style" introduced sesquipedalian Latinisms, words of immense dimensions, that could not hide their vacuity of thought. Chaucer seems deserted by his genius when "the ornate style" betrays his pangs and his anxiety. As the error of a fine genius becomes the error of many, because monstrous protuberances may be copied, while the softened lines of beauty remain inimitable, this "ornate style" corrupted inferior writers, who, losing all relish of the natural feeling and graceful simplicity of their master, filled their verse with noise and nonsense. This vicious style, a century afterwards, was resumed by STEPHEN HAWES. We have, however, a glorious evidence, amid this

struggle both with a new and with a false style, of Chaucer's native good taste: he finally wholly abandoned this artificial diction; and his later productions, no longer disfigured by such tortured phrases and such remote words, awaken our sympathy in the familiar language of life and passion.

Tyrwhit has ingeniously constructed a metrical system to arrange the versification to the ear of a modern reader: by this contrivance he would have removed all obstructions in the pronunciation and in the syllabic quantities. He maintained that the lines were regular decasyllabics. But who can read this poet for any length, even the "Canterbury Tales" in the elaborated text of Tyrwhit, without being reminded of its fallacy? Even the *e* final, on which our critic has laid such stress, though often sounded, assuredly is sometimes mute. Dan Chaucer makes at his pleasure words long or short, and dissyllabic or trisyllabic; and this he has himself told us:—

> "But for the rime is light and lewde,
> Yet make it somewhat agreáble,
> Though some verse fail in a sylláble."

Our critic was often puzzled by his own ingenuity; for in some inveterate cases he has thrown out in despair an observation, that "a reader who cannot perform such operations for himself (that is, helping out the metre) had better not trouble his head about the versification of our ancient authors." The verse of Chaucer seems more carefully regulated in his later work, "the Tales;" but it is evident that Chaucer trusted his cadences to his ear, and his verse is therefore usually rhythmical, and accidentally metrical.

On a particular occasion, the poet submitted to the restraint of equal syllables, as we discover in "the Court of Love," elaborately metrical, and addressed to "his princely lady," with the hope that she might not refuse it "for lack of ornate speech." It is evident, therefore, that Chaucer had a distinct conception of the heroic or decasyllabic verse; but he did

not consider that the mechanical construction of his verse was essential to the free spirit of his fancy. "I am no metrician," he once exclaimed: he wrote —

> "Books, songs, ditees
> In RIME, or else in CADENCE."
> *The House of Fame.*

This circumstance arose from the custom of the age, when poems were *recited*, and not *read:* readers there were none among the people, though auditors were never wanting; it was much the same among the higher orders. Poems were usually performed in plain chant, and a verse was musical by the modulation of the harp. There was no typographical metre placed under the eye of the reciter; the melody of the poet too often depended on the adroitness of the performer; and the only publishers of the popular poems of Chaucer were the harpers, who, in stately halls on festal days, entranced their audience with Chaucer's Tale, or his "Ballade." His poem of "Troilus and Cressida," although almost as long as the "Æneid," was intended to be *sung* to the harp as well as *read*, as the poet himself tells us, in addressing his poem, —

> "And *redde* where so thou be, or elles *sung*."

In the most ancient manuscripts of Chaucer's works, the cæsura in every line is carefully noted, to preserve the rhythmical cadence with precision: without this precaution, the harmony of such loose versification would be lost. In the later editions, when the race of roaming minstrels had departed, and our verse had become solely metrical, the printers omitted this guide to the ancient recitation. We perceive this want in the uncertain measures of Chaucer's versification; and a dexterous modulation is still required to catch the recitative of Chaucer's poems.

Are the works of our great poet to be consigned to the literary dungeon of the antiquary's closet? I fear that there is more than one obstruction which intervenes between the

poet's name, which will never die, and the poet's works, which will never be read. A massive tome, dark with the Gothic type, whose obsolete words and difficult phrases, and, for us, uncadenced metre, are to be conned by a glossary as obsolete as the text, to be perpetually referred to, to the interruption of all poetry and all patience, appalled even the thorough-paced antiquary, Samuel Pegge, as appears by his honest confession. Already a practised bibliosopher proclaims, alluding to the edition by Tyrwhit of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," "And who reads any other portion of the poet?" Yet the "Canterbury Tales" are but the smallest portion of Chaucer's works. But some skilful critics have perpended and decided differently: even among the projected labors of Johnson was an edition of Chaucer's works; and Godwin, when diligently occupied on this great poet, with just severity observed, that "a vulgar judgment had been propagated by slothful and indolent persons, that the 'Canterbury Tales' are the only part of the works of Chaucer worthy the attention of a modern reader; and this has contributed to the wretched state in which his works are permitted to exist."

Are we, then, no longer to linger over the visionary emotions of the great poet in the fine portraitures of his genius from his youthful days, when the fever of his soul, not knowing where to seek for its true aliment, careless of life, fed on its own sad musings, in Chaucer's "DREME;" or, onwards in life, in the "TESTAMENT OF LOVE," that chronicle of the heart in a prison solitude? And are we no longer interested in those personal traits Chaucer has so frequently dropped of his own tastes and humors, so that we are in fact better acquainted with Chaucer than we are with Shakspeare? Even during his official occupations, this poet loved his studious solitary nights, and frequently alludes to his passion. Must we close that "HOUSE OF FAME," with whose fragments Pope reared "the Temple"? Has all the enchantment of the moonlight-land of chivalry and fairyism in "THE FLOURE AND THE

LEAFE" vanished? Are we no longer to listen to "THE COMPLAINT OF THE BLACK KNIGHT," which touched a duchess or a queen? or the stanzas of "THE CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE," which musically resound that musical encounter? Is the legend of pathetic tenderness in the impassioned "TROILUS," and "the sillie woman who falsed Troilus," ever to be closed? — there may we pursue the vicissitudes of love, in what the poet calls "a little tragedy;" and we find Ovidian graces amid its utter simplicity. There are, indeed, vicissitudes of taste as well as of love. "Troilus and Cressida" was the favorite in the days of Henry VIII. over the "Canterbury Tales" and "the Floure and the Leafe;" it was, too, the model of Sidney in the court of Elizabeth: Love triumphed at court over Humor and Fancy.

It is true that the language of Chaucer has failed, but not the writer. The marble which Chaucer sculptured has betrayed the noble hand of the artist: the statue was finished; but the gray and spotty veins came forth, clouding the lucid whiteness.

For the poet or the poetical, the difficulty of the language may be surmounted with a reasonable portion of every-day patience. I know, from several of my literary contemporaries, that this, however, has not been conceded. The more familiar I became with Chaucer, the more I delighted in the significance of the Chaucerian words. From some modern critics, occasionally the name of Chaucer startles the ear. One, indeed, has recently complained that "Chaucer's divine qualities are languidly acknowledged by his unjust countrymen;"* and Coleridge emphatically said, "I take unceasing delight in Chaucer. His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is!" †

But the popularity of this gifted child of Nature, and this shrewd observer of mankind, is doomed to another obstruction

* "Autobiography of an Opium-eater." — *Tait's Mag.*, August, 1835.

† Coleridge's "Table-talk."

than that of his curious diction. The playfulness of his comic invention, and the freedom of his simplicity, will no longer be allowed to atone for the levity of some of his incidents. When Warton, to display the genuine vein of the Chaucerian humor, imprudently analyzed the "Miller's Tale," having reached the middle, the critic, recollecting himself, suddenly breaks off with a curt remark, — "The sequel cannot be repeated here!" In a recklessness of all knowledge, and in an unhappy hour, the poet of "Don Juan" decided, while he probably would have started from Chaucer's black-letter tome, that "Chaucer, notwithstanding the praises bestowed on him, I think obscene and contemptible. He owed his celebrity merely to his antiquity." As if the greatest of our poets had only been celebrated in the day when Byron wrote! Yet, in all the unfettered invention and nudity of style, there was no grossness in the temper, and less in the habits, of the poet. He addressed his own age as his contemporaries were doing in France and in Italy, and from whom he had borrowed the very two tales on which this censure has fallen. In telling "a merrie tale," Chaucer could not have anticipated this charge; and, in truth, for subjects which are obscene and disgustful he had no taste, as he showed in his reproof of Gower for having selected two repulsive ones, — the unnatural passions of Canace, and Apollonius Tyrius. Of these our Chaucer cries, —

"Of all swiche cursed stories I say, Fy!"

Our poet has himself pleaded, that, having fixed on his personage, he had no choice to tell any other tale than what that individual would himself have told. Before we immolate Chaucer on the altar of the Graces, we should not only listen to his plea, but to his own easy remedy for this disorder produced by his too faithful copy after Nature: —

"Whoso list not to hear,
Turn over the leaf, and chese another tale!"

Our notions and our customs of delicacy are the result of a change in our manners, of no distant period; and, compared with our neighbors, many are still but conventional. They are so even in respect to ourselves; for, not to go back to the golden days of Elizabeth, the language and the manners of the court of Anne would have startled modern decorum. The "polite conversation" of Swift has fortunately preserved for us specimens which we could not have imagined. Our poems, our comedies, and our tales, so late as the days of Swift and Pope, have allusions, and even incidents and descriptions, which we no longer tolerate. How far our fastidiousness lies on the surface of our lesser morals, I will not decide; but men of genius have complained that this fastidiousness has become too restrictive, by contracting the sphere of inventive humor, which flashes often in such small matters as ludicrous tales and playful levities, which must not lie on our tables.

Chaucer long remained a favorite in the most polite circles: Aubrey, at the close of the seventeenth century, in his "Idea," recommends the study of Chaucer, as the poet in full reputation. At a later period, the days of Dryden and Pope, our versifiers were continually renovating his humor and his more elegant fictions. Ogle, with others, attempted to modernize Chaucer; but it is as impossible to give such a version of Chaucer as to translate the Odes of Horace. They corrupted by their interpolations, and weakened by their diffusion: Chaucer was not discernible in the dimness of their paraphrase. The great beauties of Chaucer spring up from the soil in which they lie embedded; and the most skilful hand will discover, that, in gathering the flower, it must cease to live without its root.

We never possessed a tolerably correct edition of this master-poet; and the very circumstance of the continued popularity of the poems with the many has occasioned their present wretched condition. When works circulated in their manuscript state, before the era of printing, the popularity of a

poet made his text the more liable to corruption. Multiplied transcripts were produced by heedless or licentious scribes, whose careless omissions and whose perpetuated blunders, and even interpolations, can only be credited by the collators of the manuscripts of Chaucer. This happened with the very first printed edition by Caxton. Our patriarchal publisher discovered that he had printed from a very faulty manuscript; and, in that primitive age of simplicity and printing, nobly suppressed the edition which dishonored the author, and substituted an improved one. Doubtless GOWER, a grave and learned poet, whose copies are remarkably elegant, has descended to us in a purer condition than CHAUCER; for he was rarely transcribed. Speght was the first editor who gave a more complete edition of Chaucer, with the useful appendage of a glossary, the first of its kind, and which has been a fortunate acquisition for later glossographers. But Speght, with the aid of Stowe, who was equally industrious, was so deficient in critical acumen as to have impounded any stray on the common stamped with the initials of Chaucer. Thus our poet has suffered all the mischances of faithless scribes, unintelligent printers, and uncritical editors. To make the bad worse, the last modern edition of Chaucer, by URRY, though recommended by the white letter, offering this bland relief to a modern reader, is a showy volume, of which we are forbidden to read a line! The history of this edition is an evidence how ill our scholars, at no remote period, were qualified to decide on the fate of a great vernacular author. Urry, the pupil of Dean Aldrich and the friend of Bishop Atterbury, appears to have been one of that galaxy or confederacy of wits called "the wits of Christ Church." The "student of Christ Church, Oxon," offered a title and a place which would sanction an edition of Chaucer; one object of which was to contribute five hundred pounds to finish Peckwater Quadrangle. The pompous folio appeared heralded by the queen's license for the exclusive sale for fourteen years. Our editor at first

seems to have been reluctant and modest, till instigated by his great patrons to divest himself of all fear of the author. In his innocence conceiving that the strokes of his own pen would silently improve an obsolete genius, this merciless interpolator, changing words and syllables at pleasure, has furnished a text which Chaucer never wrote!* If the worst edition that was ever published contributed to finish Peckwater Quadrangle, it is amusing to be reminded that causes are often strangely disproportionate to their effects.

The famous portion of Chaucer's Miscellaneous Volume has been fortunate in the editorial cares of TYRWHIT. Tyrwhit, a scholar as well as an antiquary, was an expert philologer: his extensive reading in the lore of our vernacular literature and our national antiquities promptly supplied what could not have entered into his more classical studies; and his sagacity seems to have decided on the various readings of all the manuscripts by piercing into the core of the poet's thoughts.†

It is remarkable that some of the most lively productions

* So unskilful or so incurious was Warburton in the language of our ancient poets, that, in his notes on Pope, he quotes the following lines of Chaucer,—

"Love wol not be *constreined* by maistrie.
Whan maistrie cometh, the *God* of love anon
Beteth his wings, and *farewel*, he is gon,"—

from Urry's edition, in which they appear thus transformed and corrupted:—

"Love will not be *confined* by maisterie.
When maisterie comes, the *Lord* of love anon
Flutters his wings, and *forthwith* is he gone."

[An excellent example of the superior vigor of Chaucer may be seen in an original passage of his "Palamon and Arcite," contrasted with Dryden's tamer modernization of the same, in "Curiosities of Literature," vol. ii. p. 277.—ED.]

† This "sagacity" has been much and justly questioned by the more advanced students of mediæval literature. Sir Harris Nicolas has produced an excellent edition of the poet; but the best text of the "Canterbury Tales" has been published by Mr. Thomas Wright, from a careful collation of the oldest manuscript.—ED.

of several great writers have been the work of their maturest age. Johnson surpassed all his preceding labors in his last work, the popular "Lives of the Poets." The "Canterbury Tales" of Chaucer were the effusions of his advanced age, and the congenial verses of Dryden were thrown out in the luxuriance of his later days. Milton might have been classed among the minor poets, had he not lived to be old enough to become the most sublime. Let it be a source of consolation, if not of triumph, in a long studious life of true genius, to know that the imagination may not decline with the vigor of the frame which holds it: there has been no old age for many men of genius.

We must lament, that, at such an early period in our vernacular literature, we have to record that the two fathers of our poetry, congenial spirits as they were, too closely resembled most of their sons in one of the most painful infirmities of genius. I have said elsewhere, that jealousy, long supposed to be the offspring of little minds, is not, however, confined to them. We do not possess the secret history of the two great poets, Chaucer and Gower; but we are told by Berthelet in his edition of Gower's "Confessio Amantis," when he quotes the commendatory lines on Gower by Chaucer, that the poets "were both excellently learned, *both great friendes together.*" Ancient biographers usually fall into this vague style of eulogy, which served their purpose rather than a more critical research. True it is, that "they were both great friends;" but, what Berthelet has not told, they became also "both great enemies." We know that Chaucer has commemorated the dignified merits of "the moral Gower," and that Gower has poured forth an effusion not less fervid than elegant from the lips of Venus, who calls Chaucer "her own clerk, who in the flower of his youth had made ditees and songes glad which have filled the land." Did this little passion of poetic jealousy creep into their great souls? — else how did it happen that Chaucer, who had once solicited the cor-

recting hand of his friend in his latest work, reprehended the sage and the poet; and that Gower, who had not stinted the rich meed of his eulogy which appeared in the first copies of his "Confessio Amantis," erased the immortality which he had bestowed? The justice of their reciprocal praise neither of these rivals could efface; for that outlives their little jealousies.

GOWER.

In the Church of St. Saviour in Southwark may be viewed an ancient monument with its sculptured and Gothic canopy: pictured on its side, the three visionary virgins, Charity, Mercy, and Pity, solicit the prayer of the passenger for the soul of the suppliant whose image lies extended on the tomb, with folded hands, and in his damask habit flowing to his feet. His head reposes on three mighty tomes, and is decked with a garland, either of roses which proclaim his knighthood, or the wreath of literature which would more justly distinguish the wearer, — John Gower, the poet.

In the life of this poet, almost the only certain incident seems to be his sepulchral monument: and even this it had been necessary to repair after the malignity of the iconoclasts; and, of the three sculptured volumes which support the poet's head, a single one only has been opened by the world; for the tomb has perpetuated what the press has not.

The three tomes on the tomb of Gower represent his three great works; but what is remarkable, and shows the unsettled state of our literature, each of these great works is written in a different language, though equally graced with Latin titles. The first, in French, is the "Speculum Meditantis;" the moral reflections relieved by historical examples. The second, in Latin verse, is "Vox Clamantis:" this "Voice" comes not from the desert, for it is that of the clamors of the people; a satire on all ranks, and an exhortation to the youthful monarch to check his own self-indulgence. It includes a chronicle of the insurrection of the populace, or "the clowns," as they

were called in Richard the Second's reign. The vernacular style, rather than Latin verse, would have more aptly celebrated the feats of Wat Tyler, or Bet and Sim, Gibbe and Hyke, Hudde and Judde, Jack and Tib. The reporter had no doubt been present at the active scene. The swarm rush on to the call of one another, in hexameters and pentameters. The singularity of the subject, which gives no bad picture of the hurry of a disorderly mob and the felicity of an old translation, induce me to preserve a partial extract from the manuscript. Our own age has witnessed similar scenes.

"Watte vocat, cui Thome venit, neque Symme retardat,
Betteque, Gibbe simul Hyke venire jubent.
Colle furit, quem Gibbe juvat nocumenta parantes,
Cum quibus ad dampnum Wille coire vovet.
Grigge rapit, dum Dawe strepit, comes est quibus Hobbe,
Lorkin et in medio non minor esse putat.
Hudde ferit, quos Judde terit, dum Tebbe juvatur,
Jacke domos que viros vellit, et ense necat."

"Tom comes thereat, when called by Wat; and Simon as forward we find;
Bet calls as quick to Gibb and to Hyck, that neither would tarry behinde.
Gibbe, a good whelp of that litter, doth help mad Coll more mischief to do;
And Will he doth vow, the time is come now, he'll join with their company too.
Davie complains whiles Grigg gets the gains, and Hobb with them doth partake;
Lorkin aloud, in the midst of the crowd, conceiveth as deep is his stake.
Hudde doth spoil whom Judde doth foile, and Tebbe lends his helping hand;
But Jack, the mad-patch, men and horses doth snatch, and kills all at his command."

The third and greater work, and the only printed one of Gower, is the "Confessio Amantis," an English poem of about thirty thousand lines; a singular miscellany of allegory, of morality, and of tales. It is studded with sententious maxims and proverbs, and richly diversified with narrations, pleasant and tragic; but the affectation of learning — for learning in its crude state always obtrudes itself, even in works of recreation — has compressed the Aristotelian philosophy, to edify

and surprise the readers of the poet's fairy or romantic tales. Robert de Brunne, to illustrate monachal morals, interspersed domestic stories; and, amidst the prevalent penury of imagination, that rhyming monk affords the most ancient specimens of English tales in verse: and as Gower's single printed work is of the same species of composition, a system of ethics illustrated by tales, it has been thought that the monk who rhymed in 1300 was the true predecessor of the poet who flourished at the close of that century, however Gower may have purified the "rime doggrel" and elevated the puerile tale. The straw-roof must be raised before the cupola. Genius in its genealogy must not blush at its remote ancestor: the noblest knight may often go back to the mill or the forge. If this rude moralizing rhymer really be the poetical father of Gower, then is this antiquated monk the inventor of that narrative poetry which Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden, and even some of our contemporaries, have so delightfully diversified. But story-telling has been of all periods.

There is a portion in this volume which concerns the personal history of the poet.

This work was composed at the suggestion of Richard the Second himself, who among other luxuries loved Froissart's romance and Chaucer's rhymes, and was even willing to be taught the grave lessons which he could not practise. As Gower one day was rowed in his boat on the Thames, he met his "liege lord" in the royal barge, who commanded the poet to enter, and, in a long unrestrained conversation, desired him "to book some new thing in the way he was used." Probably the youthful monarch alluded to the "Vox Clamantis," in which the poet had exhorted his "liege lord" to exercise every kingly virtue, and had without reserve touched on too many imperfections of a court-life. It was to be "a book," added the young monarch, "in which he himself might often look." The poet aspired to fix the honor which he had received, and resolved, in his own words,—

"To write in such a manner-wise,
Which may be wisdom to the wise,
And play to them that list to play."

In a word, we have here the great Horatian precept by the intuition of our earliest poet.

The political admonitions, and the keen satire on the youthful favorites of the youthful monarch of a luxurious court, and the relaxed morals of the higher ranks, the clergy, and the judges, were all offered with more than the freedom of a poet: they sound the deep tones of the patriot. The sage had solemnly contemplated on the discontents and clamors of the people, and presciently observed the rising of that state-tempest which in an instant dethroned this magnificent and thoughtless prince.

In the course of the reign of Richard the Second, it appears that several alterations were made in the poem. The dedicatory preface was suppressed. Berthelet, the ancient printer of the "Confessio Amantis," discovered that "the prologue" had disappeared, though the same number of lines were substituted, "cleane contrary both in sentence and in meaning." Gower has therefore incurred the reproach of a disloyal desertion of his hapless master to court a successful usurper. One critic tells that "he was given to change with the turns of state." Bishop Nicholson, with dull levity, has a fling at all poets, for he censures Gower for "making too free with his prince, — a liberty, it seems, allowed to men of his profession;" while Thomas Hearne, the blind bigot of passive obedience, in editing a monkish life of Richard the Second, would have all Gower condemned to oblivion, because "he had treated the monarch's memory ill, and spoke with equal freedom of the clergy." This vacillating conduct of "the moral Gower," however, need not leave any stain on his memory. We see he had never at any time adulated the youthful monarch: however his tales may have charmed the royal ear, the verse often left behind a wholesome bitterness.

Gower had praised Henry of Lancaster at a period when he could not have contemplated the change of dynasty; and, when it happened, the poet was of an age far too advanced either to partake of the hopes or the fears that wait on a new reign.

But this tale of Gower's free and honest satire on courts and courtiers is not yet concluded. The sphere of a poet's influence is far wider than that of his own age; and, however we may now deem of this grave and ancient poet, he still found understanding admirers so late as in the reign of Charles the First. In the curious "Conference" which took place when Charles the First visited the Marquess of Worcester, at Ragland Castle, with his court, there is the following anecdote respecting the poet Gower.

The marquess was a shrewd though whimsical man, and a favorite of the king for his frankness and his love of the arts. His lordship entertained the royal guest with extraordinary magnificence. Among his rare curiosities was a sumptuous copy of Gower's volume.

Charles the First usually visited the marquess after dinner. Once he found his lordship with the book of John Gower lying open, which the king said he had never before seen. "Oh!" exclaimed the marquess; "it is a book of books! and, if your majesty had been well versed in it, it would have made you a king of kings."—"Why so, my lord?"—"Why, here is set down how Aristotle brought up and instructed Alexander the Great in all the rudiments and principles belonging to a prince." And, under the persons of Aristotle and Alexander, the marquess read the king such a lesson, that all the standers-by were amazed at his boldness.

The king asked whether he had his lesson by heart, or spake out of the book. "Sir, if you would read my heart, it may be that you might find it there; or, if your majesty pleased to get it by heart, I will lend you my book." The king accepted the offer.

Some of the new-made lords fretted, and bit their thumbs, at certain passages in the marquess's discourse; and some protested that no man was so much for the absolute power of a king as Aristotle. The marquess told the king that he would indeed show him one remarkable passage to that purpose; and, turning to the place, read:—

> "A king can kill; a king can save;
> A king can make a lord a knave;
> And, of a knave, a lord also."

On this several new-made lords slank out of the room; which the king observing, told the marquess, "My lord, at this rate, you will drive away all my nobility."

This amusing anecdote is an evidence that this ethical poet, after two centuries and a half, was not forgotten: his spirit was still vital, his volume still lay open on the library-table; it afforded a pungent lesson to the courtiers of Charles the First, as it had to those of Richard the Second.

Gower was learned, didactic, and dignified. The manuscripts of his works are usually noble and sumptuous copies; more elegantly written and more richly illuminated than the works of other poets. His commonplaces and his legendary lore seem to have awed the simplicity of the readers of two centuries, whose taste did not yet feel that failure of the poet who narrated a fable from Ovid with the dull prolixity of a matter-of-fact chronicler. His fictions are rarely imaginative; yet critics, far abler judges of his relative merits than ourselves, since they lived within the sphere of his influence, hailed this grave father of our poesy. Leland, the royal antiquary of Henry the Eighth, expressed his ideas with great elegance and sensibility when he said of Gower, that "his diligent culture of our poesy had extirpated the ordinary herbs, and that the soft violet and the purple narcissus were now growing where erst was nothing seen but the thistle and the thorn." There are, indeed, some graceful flowers in his desert. But all criticism is usually relative to the age, and

excellence is always comparative. GOWER stamped with the force of ethical reasoning his smooth rhymes; and this was a near approach to poetry itself. If in the mind of CHAUCER we are more sensible of the impulses of genius, — those creative and fugitive touches, — his diction is more mixed and unsettled than the tranquil elegance of GOWER, who has often many pointed sentences and a surprising neatness of phrase. A modern reader, I think, would find the style of Gower more easily intelligible than the higher efforts of the more inventive poet.

PIERS PLOUGHMAN.

CONTEMPORARY with GOWER and CHAUCER lived the singular author of "the Visions of William concerning PIERS PLOUGHMAN;" singular in more respects than one, for his subject, his style, and, we may add, for the intrepidity and the force of his genius.

This extraordinary work is ascribed to one whose name is merely traditional, — to Robert Langland, a secular priest of Salop: when he wrote, and where he died, are as dubious as his text, the authenticity of which is often uncertain from the variations in all the manuscripts. But the real life of an author, at least for posterity, lies beyond the grave; and no writer is nameless whose volume has descended to us as one of the most memorable in our ancient vernacular literature.

In character, in execution, and in design, "the Visions of William of PIERS PLOUGHMAN" are wholly separated from the polished poems of GOWER and CHAUCER; the work bears no trace of their manner, nor of their refinement, nor of their versification; and it has baffled conjectural criticism to assign the exact period of a composition which appears more ancient than any supposed contemporary writings. Those who would decide of the time in which an author wrote by his style, here are at a loss to conceive that the splendid era of romantic chivalry, the age of Edward the Third and his grandson, which produced the curious learning and the easy rhymes of the "Confessio Amantis" and the pleasantry and the fine discriminations of character of the "Canterbury Tales," could have given birth to the antiquated Saxon and

rustic pith of this genuine English bard. Either his labor was concluded ere the writings of the court-poets had travelled to our obscure country priest in his seclusion in a distant county, or else he disdained their exotic fancies, their Latinisms, their Gallicisms, and their Italianisms, and their trivial rhymes, that in every respect he might remain their astonishing contrast, with no inferiority of genius. There was no philosophical criticism in the censure of this poet by Warton, when he condemns him for not having "availed himself of the rising and rapid improvements of the English language," and censures him for his "affectation of obsolete English." These rising improvements may never have reached our bard, or, if they had, he might have disdained them; for the writer of the "Visions concerning Piers Ploughman" was strictly a national poet: and there was no "affectation of obsolete English" in a poet preserving the forms of his native idiom, and avoiding all exotic novelties in the energy of his Anglo-Saxon genius. His uncontaminated mind returned to or continued the Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre and unrhymed verse: he trusted its cadence to the ear, scorning the subjection of rhyme. WEBBE, a critic of the age of Elizabeth, considered this poet as "the first who had observed the quantity of our verse without the curiosity of rhyme."

It is useless to give the skeleton of a desultory and tedious allegorical narrative. The last editor, Dr. Whitaker, imagined that "he for the first time had shown that it was written after a regular and consistent design;" notwithstanding that he himself confesses that "the conclusion is singularly cold and comfortless, and *leaves the inquirer, after a long peregrination, still remote from the object of his search*,"—a conclusion where nothing is concluded! The visionist might have been overtaken by sleep among the bushes of the Malvern Hills for twenty cantos more, without at all deranging any thing which he had said, or inconveniencing any thing which he might say. In truth, it is a heap of rhapsodies, without any artifice of

connection or involution of plot, or any sustained interest of one actor more than another among the numerous ideal beings who flit along the dreamy scenes.

The true spirit of this imaginative work is more comprehensible than any settled design. That mysterious or mythical personage, "Piers Ploughman," is the representative of "the Universal Church," says Dr. Whitaker; or "Christian life," says Mr. Campbell. What he may be is very doubtful; for we have "True Religion," a fair lady, who puts in surely a higher claim to represent "the Universal Church" or "Christian life" than "the Ploughman," who has to till his half-acre, and save his idling companions from "waste" and "wane." The most important personage is "Mede," or bribery, who seems to exert an extraordinary influence over the Bench and the Bar and the Church, and through every profession which occurred to the poet.

The pearls in these waters lie not on the surface. The visionist had deeper thoughts and more concealed feelings than these rhapsodical phantoms. In a general survey of society, he contemplates on the court and the clergy, glancing through all the diversified ranks of the laity; not sparing the people themselves, as their awful reprover. It was a voice from the wilderness in the language of the people. The children of want and oppression had found their solitary advocate. The prelacy, dissolved in the luxuriousness of papal pomp, and a barbarous aristocracy, with their rapacious dependants, were mindless of the morals or the happiness of those human herds, whose heads were counted, but whose hearts they could never call their own.

We are curious to learn, in this disordered state of the Commonwealth, the political opinions entertained by this sage. They are as mysterious as Piers Ploughman himself.

Passive obedience to the higher powers is inculcated apparently rather for its prudence than its duty. This we infer from his lively parable of "the Cat of a Court," and "a Route

of Ratones and Small Mice." "Grimalkin, though sometimes apt to play the tyrant when appetite was sharp, would often come laughing and leaping among them. A rat, a whisker of renown, cunningly proposed to adorn the cat with an ornament, like those which great lords use who wear chains and collars about their necks: it should be a tinkling bell, which, if cats would fancy the fashion, would warn us of their approach. We might then in security be all lords ourselves, and not be in this misery of creeping under benches. But not a raton of the whole rout, for the realm of France, or to win all England, would bind the bell round the imperial neck. A mouseling, who did not much like rats, concluded, that if they should even kill the cat, then there would come another to crunch us and our kind; for men will not have their meal nibbled by us mice, nor their nights disturbed by the clattering of roystering rats. Better for us to let the cat alone! My old father said a kitten was worse. The cat never hurt me: when he is in good humor, I like him well; and, by my counsel, cat nor kitten shall be grieved. I will suffer, and say nothing. The beast who now chastiseth many may be amended by misfortune. Are the rats to be our governors? I tell ye, we would not rule ourselves!" The poet adds, "What this means, ye men who love mirth, interpret for me; for I dare not!"

The parable seems sufficiently obvious. The ratons represent a haughty aristocracy; and "the small mouse" is one of the people themselves, who in his mouse-like wisdom preferred a single sovereign to many lords. But the poet's own reflection, addressed to "the men of mirth," seems enigmatic. Is he indulging a secret laugh at the passive obedience of the prudential mouse?

Our author's indignant spirit, indeed, is vehemently democratic. He dared to write what many trembled to whisper. Genius reflects the suppressed feelings of its age. It was a stirring epoch. The spirit of inquisition had gone forth in

the person of Wickliffe; and, wherever a Wickliffe appears, as surely will there be a Piers Ploughman. When a great precursor of novel opinions arises, it is the men of genius in seclusion who think and write.

But our country priest, in his contemplative mood, was not less remarkable for his prudence than for his bold freedom, aware that the most corrupt would be the most vindictive. The implacable ecclesiastics, by the dread discipline of the Church, would doom the apostle of humanity, but the apostate of his order, to perpetual silence by the spell of an anathema; and the haughty noble would crush his victim by the iron arm of his own or of the civil power. The day had not yet arrived when the great were to endure the freedom of reprehension. The sage, the satirist, and the seer (for prophet he proved to be) veiled his head in allegory: he published no other names than those of the virtues and the vices; and, to avoid personality, he contented himself with personification.

A voluminous allegory is the rudest and the most insupportable of all poetic fictions: it originates in an early period of society, when its circles are contracted and isolated, and the poet is more conversant with the passions of mankind than with individuals. A genius of the highest order alone could lead us through a single perusal of such a poem, by the charm of vivifying details, which enables us to forget the allegory altogether,—the tedious drama of nonentities or abstract beings. In such creative touches the author of Piers Ploughman displays pictures of domestic life with the minute fidelity of a Flemish painting, so veracious is his simplicity. He is a great satirist, touching with caustic invective or keen irony public abuses and private vices; but in the depth of his emotions, and in the wildness of his imagination, he breaks forth in the solemn tones and with the sombre majesty of Dante.

But this rude native genius was profound as he was sagacious, and his philosophy terminated in prophecy. At the

era of the Reformation, they were startled by the discovery of an unknown writer, who, two centuries preceding that awful change, had predicted *the fate of the religious houses from the hand of a king.* The visionary seer seems to have fallen on the principle which led Erasmus to predict that "*those who were in power*" would seize on the rich shrines, because *no other class of men* in society could mate with so mighty a body as the monks. Power only could accomplish that great purpose, and hence our vaticinator fixed on the highest as the most likely; and the deep foresight of an obscure country priest, which required two centuries to be verified, became a great moral and political prediction.

Without, however, depreciating the sagacity of the predictor, there is reason to suspect that the same thought was occurring to some of the great themselves. The Reformation of Henry the Eighth may be dated from the reign of Richard the Second. That mighty transition into a new order of events in our history would then have occurred; for the stag was started, and the hunt was up. It was an accidental and unexpected circumstance which turned aside the impending event, which was to be future, and not immediate. Henry Bolingbroke, in the early part of his life, seems to have entertained some free opinions respecting the property of the Church. He seemed not unfavorable to Wickliffe's doctrines, and, when Earl of Derby, once declared that "princes had too little, and religious houses too much." This unguarded expression, which was not to be forgotten, we are told, occasioned one of the rebellions during his reign. But, when Henry Bolingbroke usurped the throne, age and prudence might have come together: the monarch balanced the dread of a turbulent aristocracy, and the uncertain tenure of dominion to be held at their pleasure, against the security of sheltering the throne under the broad alliance of a potent prelacy, — a potent prelacy whose doom was fixed, though the hour had not yet struck. The monarch affixed a bloody seal

to this political convention by granting a statute which made the offence of heresy capital; a crime which heretofore in law was as unknown as it seemed impossible to designate, and described only in figurative terms, as something very alarming, but which any prudent heretic might easily, if not explain, at least recant. To give it more solemnity, the statute is delivered in Latin; and the punishment of burning was to be inflicted *corum populo, in eminente loco.*"*

The "Visions of Piers Ploughman," when the day which his prescience anticipated arrived, were eagerly received: it is said the work passed through three editions in one year, about 1550, in the reign of the youthful monarch of the Reformation. The readers at that early period of printing would find many passages congenial to the popular sentiments, and our nameless author was placed among the founders of a new era.

The "Visions of Piers Ploughman" will always offer studies for the poetical artist. This volume, and not Gower's nor Chaucer's, is a well of English undefiled. Spenser often beheld these Visions; Milton, in his sublime description of the Lazar House, was surely inspired by a reminiscence of Piers Ploughman. Even Dryden, whom we should not suspect to be much addicted to black-letter reading beyond his Chaucer, must have carefully conned our Piers Ploughman; for he has borrowed one very striking line from our poet, and possibly may have taken others. Byron, though he has thrown out a crude opinion of Chaucer, has declared that "the Ploughman" excels our ancient poets. And I am inclined to think that we owe to Piers Ploughman an allegorical work of the same wild invention, from that other creative mind, the author of the "Pilgrim's Progress." How can we think of the one, without being reminded of the other? Some distant relationship seems to exist between the Ploughman's

* Barrington's "Observations on the more ancient Statutes."

Dowell and *Dobet*, and *Dobest*, Friar *Flatterer*, *Grace* the portress of the magnificent Tower of *Truth* viewed at a distance, and by its side the dungeon of *Care*, *Natural Understanding*, and his lean and stern wife *Study*, and all the rest of this numerous company, and the shadowy pilgrimage of the "Immortal Dreamer" to "the Celestial City." Yet I would mistrust my own feeling, when so many able critics, in their various researches after a prototype of that singular production, have hitherto not suggested what seems to me obvious.*

Why our rustic bard selected the character of a ploughman as the personage adapted to convey to us his theological mysteries, we know not precisely to ascertain; but it probably occurred as a companion fitted to the humbler condition of the apostles themselves. Such, however, was the power of the genius of this writer, that his successors were content to look for no one of a higher class to personify their solemn themes. Hence we have "the Crede of Piers Ploughman;" "the Prayer and Complaint of the Ploughman;" "the Ploughman's Tale," inserted in Chaucer's volume; all being equally directed against the vicious clergy of the day.

* For the general reader, I fear that "The Visions of Piers Ploughman" must remain a sealed book. The last edition of Dr. WHITAKER, the most magnificent and frightful volume that was ever beheld in the black-letter, was edited by one whose delicacy of taste unfitted him for this homely task: the plain freedom of the vigorous language is sometimes castrated, with a faulty paraphrase and a slender glossary; and passages are slurred over with an annihilating &c. Much was expected from this splendid edition: the subscription-price was quadrupled, and on its publication every one would rid himself of the mutilated author. The editor has not assisted the reader through his barbarous text interspersed with Saxon characters and abbreviations, and the difficulties of an obscure and elliptical phraseology in a very antiquated language. Should ever a new edition appear, the perusal would be facilitated by printing with the white-letter. There is an excellent specimen for an improved text and edition in "Gent. Mag.," April, 1834. [This improved text of the "Vision" and "Crede" has, since this note was originally written, been published with notes by T. Wright, M.A.; and has been again reprinted recently.]

"The Crede of Piers Ploughman," if not written by the author of the "Vision," is at least written by a scholar who fully emulates his master; and Pope was so deeply struck with this little poem, that he has very carefully analyzed the whole.

OCCLEVE, THE SCHOLAR OF CHAUCER.

WARTON passed sentence on OCCLEVE as "a cold genius and a feeble writer." A literary antiquary, from a manuscript in his possession, published six poems of Occleve; but that selection was limited to the sole purpose of furnishing the personal history of the author.* Ritson's sharp snarl pronounced that they were of "peculiar stupidity;" George Ellis refused to give "a specimen;" and Mr. Hallam, with his recollection of the critical brotherhood, has decreed, that "the poetry of Occleve is wretchedly bad, abounding with pedantry, and destitute of grace or spirit." We could hardly expect to have heard any more of this doomed victim, — this ancient man, born in the fourteenth century, standing before us, whose dry bones will ill bear all this shaking and cuffing.

A literary historian, who has read manuscripts with the eagerness which others do the last novelty, more careful than Warton, and more discriminate than Ritson, has, with honest intrepidity, confessed that "OCCLEVE has not had his just share of reputation. His writings greatly assisted the growth of the popularity of our infant poetry."† Our historian has

* "*Poems by* THOMAS HOCCLEVE, *never before printed, selected from a manuscript in the possession of George Mason, with a preface, notes, and glossary,*" 1796. The notes are not amiss, and the glossary is valuable; but the verses printed by Mason are his least interesting productions. The poet's name is here written with an H, as it appeared in the manuscript; but there is no need of a modern editor changing the usual mode, because names were diversely written or spelt even in much later times. The present writer has been called not only *Occleve*, but *Occliffe*, as we find him in Chaucer's works.

† Turner's "History of England," v. 335.

furnished from the manuscripts of Occleve testimonies of his assertion.

Among the six poems printed, one of considerable length exhibits the habits of a dissipated young gentleman in the fourteenth century.

Occleve for more than twenty years was a writer in the Privy Seal, where we find quarter-days were most irregular; and though briberies constantly flowed in, yet the golden shower passed over the heads of the clerks, dropping nothing into the hands of these innocents.

Our poet, in his usual passage from his "Chestres Inn by the Strond" to "Westminster Gate," by land or water, — for "in the winter the way was deep," and "the Strand" was then what its name indicates, — often was delayed by —

> "The outward signe of Bacchus and his lure,
> That at his dore hangeth day by day,
> Exciteth Folk to taste of his moistúre,
> So often that they cannot well say Nay!"

There was another invitation for this susceptible writer of the Privy Seal.

> "I dare not tell how that the fresh repair
> Of Venus femel, lusty children dear,
> That so goodly, so shapely were, and fair,
> And so pleasánt of port and of manére."

There he loitered —

> "To talk of mirth, and to disport and play."

He never "pinched" the taverners, the cooks, the boatmen, and all such gentry.

> "Among this many in mine audience,
> Methought I was ymade a man for ever;
> So tickled me that nyce reverénce,
> That it me made larger of dispence:
> For Riot payeth largely ever mo;
> He stinteth never till his purse be bare."

He is at length seized amid his jollities: —

"By force of the penniless maladíe,
Ne lust * had none to Bacchus House to hie.
Fy! lack of coin departeth compaignie;
And hevé purse with Herté liberál
Quencheth the thirsty heat of Hertés drie,
Where chinchy Herté † hath thereof but small."

This "mirror of riot and excess" effected a discovery; and it was, that all the mischiefs which he recounts came from the high reports of himself which servants bring to their lord. The Losengour or pleasant flatterer was too lightly believed, and honeyed words made more harmful the deceitful error. "O babbling flattery!" he spiritedly exclaims, "author of all lyes, that causest all day thy lord to fare amiss." Such is the import of the following uncouth verse:—

"Many a servant unto his Lord saith
That all the world speaketh of him Honoúr,
When the contrarie of that is sooth in faith;
And lightly leeved is this Losengoúr,‡
His hony wordés wrapped in Erroúr,
Blindly conceived been, the more harm is.
O thou, FAVELE, of lesynges auctoúr,§
Causest all day thy Lord to fare amiss.
The Combre worldés‖ 'clept been Enchantoúrs
In Bookes, as I have red."

OCCLEVE was a shrewd observer of his own times. That this rhymer was even a playful painter of society, we have a remarkable evidence preserved in the volume of his great

* No desire. † Niggardly heart.

‡ A Chaucerian word, which well deserves preservation in the language.

§ FAVELL, author of "Lyes." FAVELL the editor of Hoccleve explains as *cajolerie*, or flattery, by words given by Carpentier in his supplement to "Du Cange." Favel is personified by "Piers Ploughman," and in Skelton's "Bouge of Court." FAVELE, in langue Romane, is Flattery: hence *Fabel*, Fabling. — ROQUEFORT'S *Dictionnaire*. The Italian FAVELLIO, *parlerie*, *babil*, *caquet*, — Alberti's "Grand Dictionnaire," — does not wholly convey the idea of our modern *Humbug*, which combines *fabling* and *caquet*.

‖ The encumbrances to the world. In another poem he calls death "that Coimbre-world." It was a favorite expression with him, taken from Chaucer. — See "Warton," ii. 352, note.

master. "The Letter of Cupid," in the works of Chaucer, was the production of Occleve, and appears to have been overlooked by his modern critics. He had originally entitled it, "A Treatise of the Conversation of Men and Women in the Little Island of Albion." It is a caustic "polite conversation," and deemed so execrably good, as to have excited, as our ancient critic Speght tells, "such hatred among the gentlewomen of the Court, that Occleve was forced to recant in that boke of his called 'Planetas Proprius.'"* The Letter of Cupid is thus dated:—

"Written in the lusty month of May,
In our Paléis, where many a millión
Of lovers true have habitatión;
The yere of grace joyfull and jocúnd,
A thousand four hundred and secónd."

Imagery and imagination are not required in the school of society. Occleve seems, however, sometimes to have told a tale not amiss; for WILLIAM BROWN, the pastoral bard, inserted entire a long story by old Occleve in his "Shepherd's Pipe." To us he remains sufficiently uncouth. The language had not at this period acquired even a syntax; though, with all its rudeness, it was neither wanting in energy nor copiousness, from that adoption of the French, the Provençal, and the Italian, with which Chaucer had enriched his vein. The present writer seems to have had some notions of the critical art: for he requests the learned tutor of Prince Edward, afterwards Edward the Fourth, to warn him when—

"Metring amiss;"—

and when—

"He speaks unsyttingly,†
Or not by just peys‡ my sentence weigh,
And not to the order of enditing obey,
And my colours set ofté sythe awry."

* A title which does not appear in the catalogue of his writings by Ritson, in his "Bibliographia Poetica."

† Unfittingly. ‡ Weight; probably from the French *poids*.

We might be curious to learn, with all these notions of the suitable, the weighty, the order of inditing, and the colors often awry, whether these versifiers had really any settled principles of criticism. Occleve is a vernacular writer, bare of ornament. He has told us that he knew little of "Latin nor French," though often counselled by his immortal master. His enthusiastic love thus exults:—

> "Thou wer't acquainted with Chaucer?—Pardie!
> God save his soul!
> The first findér of our faire langáge!"

There is one little circumstance more which connects the humble name of this versifier with that of Chaucer. His affectionate devotion to the great poet has been recorded by Speght in his edition of Chaucer. "Thomas Occleve, for the love he bare to his master, caused his picture to be truly drawn in his book 'De Regimine Principis,' dedicated to Henry the Fifth." In this manuscript, with "fond idolatry," he placed the portraiture of his master facing an invocation. From this portrait the head on the poet's monument was taken, as well as all our prints. It bears a faithful resemblance to the picture of Chaucer painted on board in the Bodleian Library.* Had Occleve, with his feelings, sent us down some memorials of the poet and the man, we should have conned his verse in better humor; but the history of genius had not yet entered even into the minds of its most zealous votaries.†

* It is in Royal MS. 17 D. 6. The best is in the Harleian MS. 4866. There is also a very curious full-length preserved in a single leaf of vellum, Sloane MS. 5141; which has been copied in Shaw's "Dresses and Decorations of the Middle Ages," vol. i.—ED.

† A single trait, however, has come down to us from that other scholar of Chaucer, whom we are next to follow. Lydgate assures us, from what he heard, that the great poet would not suffer petty criticisms "to perturb his reste." He did not like to groan over, and "pinch at every blot," but always "did his best:"—

> "My master Chaucer that founde ful many spot,
> Hym lyste not gruche, nor pynch at every blot;
> Nor move himself to perturb his reste;
> I have perde tolde, but seyd alway his beste."—LYDGATE'S *Troy*.

LYDGATE, THE MONK OF BURY.

LYDGATE, the monk of Bury, was also the scholar of Chaucer. Our monk had not passed a whole sequestered life in his Benedictine monastery: he had journeyed through France and Italy, and was familiar with the writings of Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio, and of Alain Chartier. The delectable catalogue of his writings, great and small, exceeds two hundred and fifty; and may not yet be complete, for they lie scattered in their manuscript state. A great multitude of writings, the incessant movements of a single mind, will at first convey to us a sense of magnitude; and in this magnitude, if we observe the greatest possible diversity of parts, and, if we may use the term, the flashings of the most changeable contrasts, we must place such a universal talent among the phenomena of literature.

LYDGATE composed epics, which were the lasting favorites of two whole centuries, — so long were classical repetitions of "Troy" and of "Thebes" not found irksome.* In his graver hours he instructed the world by ethical descants, Æsopian fables, and quaint proverbs; fixed their wonder by saintly legends and veracious chronicles; and disported in amorous ditties, and many a merrie tale: translating or inventing, labor or levity, rounded the unconscious day of the versifying monk. We descend from the "Siege of Troy," a romance of nearly

* "The Troy Tale" was composed at the command of the king, Henry the Fifth; as "the Fall of Princes," from Boccace, was at the desire of Humphrey, the good Duke of Gloucester. He wrote regal poems for kings, while he dispersed wisdom and merriment for their subjects.

thirty thousand lines, which long graced the oriel window, to the freer vein of humor of "London Lick-penny," which opens the street scenery of London in the fourteenth century; and "the Prioresse and her Three Wooers," that exquisitely ludicrous narrative ballad for the people.*

Ritson, whose rabid hostility to the clerical character was part of his constitutional malady, whether it related to "a mendacious prelate" or "a stinking monk," after having expended twenty pages in the mere enumeration of the titles of Lydgate's writings, heartlessly hints at the "cart-loads of rubbish of a voluminous poetaster, — a prosaic and drivelling monk;" and this is greedily seized on by the hand of the bibliographer. Percy and Ellis, too, mention DAN LYDGATE with contempt. Critics often find it convenient to resemble dogs, by barking one after the other, without any other cause than the first bark of a brother, who had only bayed the moon. It now seemed concluded that the rhyming monk was to be dismissed for ever. A very credible witness, however, at last deposed that "Lydgate has been oftener abused than read." † And now Mr. Hallam tells us that "GRAY, no light authority, speaks more favorably of Lydgate than either Warton or Ellis;" and this nervous writer, with his accustomed correct discernment, has alleged a valid reason why Gray

* While this volume is passing through the press, "A selection from the Minor Poems of Lydgate" has been edited by Mr. Halliwell. The versatility of Lydgate's poetical skill is advantageously shown in his comic satire, and his ethics drawn from a deep insight into human nature. The editor suggests a new reading for the title of the ballad of "London *Lick-penny*," more suitable to the misadventures of its hero, — London *Lack-penny;*" for London could not lick a penny from the forlorn hero who had not one to offer to it. GROSE, probably taken by the humorous designation, has placed it among his local proverbs.

The tale of the "Prioress and her Three Wooers" is one of the happiest fabliaux. Mr. Campbell transcribed "the merrie tale" for his Specimens; when he discovered that a preceding forager had anticipated him in Mr. Jamieson, who has preserved it in his "Popular Ballads," i. 253.

† Turner's "Hist. of England," v.

excelled them in this criticism: for "great poets have often the taste to discern, and the candor to acknowledge, those beauties which are latent amidst the tedious dulness of their humbler brethren."

Warton has, however, afforded three copious chapters on Lydgate, which are half as much as his enthusiasm bestowed on Chaucer. A Gothic monk, composing ancient romances, was a subject too congenial to have been neglected by the historian of our poetry, and he has limned and illuminated the feudal priest with the love of the votary, who deemed, in his "lone hours," —

> "Nor rough nor barren are the winding ways
> Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

His miniature is exquisitely touched. "He was not only the poet of his monastery, but of the world in general. If a *disguising* was intended by the company of goldsmiths, a *mask* before his majesty, a *May-game* for the sheriffs and aldermen of London, a *mumming* before the lord-mayor, a procession of *pageants* for the festival of Corpus Christi, or a *carol* for the coronation, Lydgate was consulted, and gave the poetry."*

Mr. HALLAM objects that "the attention fails in the schoolboy stories of Thebes and Troy; but it seems probable that Lydgate would have been a better poet in satire upon his own times, or delineation of their manners, — themes which would have gratified US much more than the fate of princes."

This is relatively true, — true as regards some of US, but not at all as respects Lydgate, nor the people of his age, nor

* I may point out the raw material which our poetical antiquary has here worked up with such perfect effect in this picturesque enumeration. Appended to Speght's "Chaucer," that editor furnished a very curious list of about a hundred works by Lydgate, which were in his own possession. Most of the singular poetical exhibitions here enumerated are mentioned towards the end of that list, and which Warton has happily appropriated, and so turned a dry catalogue into a poetical picture. [A selection of Lydgate's Poems, forty-four in number, were printed by the Percy Society in 1840.]

the king and the princes who commanded themes congenial with their military character and their simple tastes, romantically charming the readers of two centuries. If our critic, in the exercise of his energetic faculties, lives out of the necromancy of the old Romaunt, afar from Thebes and Troy, Thomas Warton was cradled among the children of fancy, and in his rovings had tasted their wild honey. The only works of Lydgate which attracted his attention were precisely these tedious "Fate of Princes" and "the Troy Book."

The other modern critics — Ritson, Percy, and Ellis — had but a slight knowledge of DAN* LYDGATE. They have generally acted on the pressure of the moment to get up a hasty court of *Pie-poudre* — that fugitive tribunal held at fairs — to determine on the case of a culprit even before they could shake the dust off their feet. But time calls for an arrest of hasty judgments, or brings forward some illustrious advocate to reverse the judicial decision, or set forth the misfortunes of the accused. Two, most eminent in genius, stand by the side of the monk of Bury, — COLERIDGE and GRAY. Coleridge has left us his protest in favor of Lydgate; for he deeply regrets, that, in the general collection of our poets, the unpoetic editor "had not substituted *the whole of Lydgate's works from the manuscript extant* for the almost worthless Gower."† Gray alone has taken an enlarged view of the state of our poetry and our language at this period. When that master-spirit abandoned the history of our poetry from his fastidious

* DAN, as Ritson tells us, is a title given to the individuals of certain religious orders, from the barbarous Latin *Domnus*, a variation of *Dominus*, or the French *Dam* or *Dom*. *Dan* became a corruption of *Don* for *Dominus*. The title afterwards extended to persons of respectable condition, as vague as our complimentary esquire. It was applied to Chaucer by Spenser; and, when obsolete, it became jocular; for we have "Dan Cupid." Prior renewed it with ludicrous gravity when telling a tale which he had from "Dan Pope." It is still used in an honorable sense by the Spaniards in their DON.

† "Literary Remains," ii. 130.

delicacy or from his learned indolence, because Warton had projected it, English literature sustained an irreparable loss.* In Gray, surely, we have lost a literary historian such as the world has not yet had; so rare is that genius who happily combines qualities apparently incompatible. In his superior learning, his subtle taste, his deeper thought, and his more vigorous sense, we should have found the elements of a more philosophical criticism, with a more searching and comprehensive intellect, than can be awarded to our old favorite, THOMAS WARTON. In the neglected quartos of GRAY, we discover that the poet had set earnestly to work on the archæology of our poetry; we also find in his works those noble versions of the Northern Scalds and the Welsh bards, which he designed to have introduced into his history,—thus to have impressed on us a perfect notion of a national poetry by poetry itself; a rare good fortune, which does not enliven the toil of prosaic critics or verbal interpreters. Gray had found the manuscripts of Lydgate at Cambridge, and has made them a vehicle for the most beautiful disquisitions. On a passage in Lydgate, the poet-critic develops a curious occurrence in the history of the poetic art; namely, that proneness to minute circumstances which lengthens the strains of our elder poets, and which the impatience of modern taste rejects as tediousness: yet this will be found to be "the essence of poetry and oratory." This topic is important; and, as I can neither add nor dare to take away from this perfect criticism, I submit to the task of transcribing what I am sure will come to most of my readers in all its freshness and novelty.

Our ancient poet seems to be apologizing for telling long stories, which he asserts cannot be told "in wordes few:"—

* The great poet has left two or three most precious fragments; but these have long been buried in those ill-fated quartos, consisting chiefly of notes on Greek and on Plato, which Matthias published with extraordinary pomp, and, so he used to say, as a monument for himself as well as the bard,—a monument which, his egregious self-complacency lived to witness, partook more of the properties of a tombstone than the glory of a column.

"For a storye which is not plainly told,
But constreyned under *wordes few*
For lack of truth, wher they ben new or olde,
Men by reporte cannot the matter shewe:
These oakés greaté be not down yhewe
First at a stroke, but by *a long prócesse;*
Nor long stories a word may not expresse."

LYDGATE, in his "Fall of Princes."

On this, Gray has delivered the following observations: "These 'long processes,' indeed, suited wonderfully with the attention and simple curiosity of the age in which LYDGATE lived: many a *stroke* have he and the best of his contemporaries spent upon *a sturdy old story*, till they had blunted their own edge and that of their readers; at least, a modern reader will find it so. But it is a folly to judge of the understanding and patience of those times by our own. They loved, I will not say tediousness, but *length* and a train of circumstances, in a narration. The vulgar do so still: it gives an air of reality to facts; it fixes the attention; raises and keeps in suspense their expectation, and supplies the defects of their little and lifeless imagination; and it keeps pace with the slow motion of their own thoughts. Tell them a story as you would tell it to a man of wit; it will appear to them as an object seen in the night by a flash of lightning: but, when you have placed it in various lights and in various positions, they will come at last to see and feel it as well as others. But we need not confine ourselves to the vulgar, and to understandings beneath our own. Circumstance ever was and ever will be the life and the essence both of oratory and of poetry. It has in some sort the same effect upon every mind that it has upon that of the populace; and I fear the *quickness and delicate impatience of these polished times* in which we live are but the forerunners of the decline of all those beautiful arts which depend upon the imagination. Homer, the father of *circumstance*, has occasion for the same apology which I am making for Lydgate and for his predecessors." *

* "Gray's Works," by Matthias, ii. p. 60.

At the monastery of Bury we might have listened to that Gothic monk's "goodly tale," or "notable proverb of Æsopus" for the nonce; or saintly legend, or "merrie balade;" or the story of "Thebes," which the scholar took up from his master Chaucer; or that from "Bochas," and Guido Colonna's "Troy Book:" but too numerous were the volumes to tell, and too voluminous was many a volume. Verbose and diffuse, yet clear and fluent, ran his page; too minutely copious were his descriptions, yet the delineations seemed the more graphical; his verse, too long or too short, halts in his measures till we fall into the minstrel's "metring," and lines break forth, beautiful as any in our day. He expands the same image, and loses all likeness in a prolix simile; for his readers were not so impatient as ourselves. These poets suffered or enjoyed a fatal facility of rhyming, lost for us, from the use of polysyllabic words from the French and the Latin accented on the last syllable, — a custom continued by the Scots; and these provided them with too ready an abundance of poetic terminations or rhymes, tending to make their poems voluminous. The art of selection is the art of an age less florid and more fastidious, but not always more genial or more inventive. The pruning-hook was not in use when planters were too eager to gather the first-fruits from the trees which their own hands had put into the earth.

Alas! apologies only leave irremediable faults as they were. The tediousness of Dan Lydgate remains as languid, his verse as halting, and "Thebes" and "Troy" as desolate, as we found them!

Let us, however, be reminded, that he who wholly neglects the study of our ancient poets must submit to the loss of knowledge which a philosopher would value: the manners of the age, the modes of feeling, the stream of thought, the virgin fancies, and that position which the human character takes in distant ages, — these will imbue his memory with the genius of his country and the eternal truth of authentic na-

ture. No English poet should wholly resign these masses of vernacular poetry to the lone closet of the antiquary: he who loves the gain of labor will excavate these quarries for their marble; for we know they are marble, since many a noble column has been raised from these shapeless and unhewed blocks.

THE INVENTION OF PRINTING.

PRINTING remained, as long as its first artificers could keep it, a secret and occult art; and it is the only one that ceaselessly operates all the miracles which the others had vainly promised.

Who first thought to carve the wooden immovable letters on blocks? — to stamp the first sheet which ever was imprinted? Or who, second in invention, but first in utility, imagined to cast the metal with fusil types, separate from each other? — to fix this scattered alphabet in a form, and thus by one stroke write a thousand manuscripts, and, with the identical letters, multiply, not a single work, but all sorts of works hereafter? Was it fortunate chance, or deliberate meditation, or both in gradual discovery, which produced this invention? In truth, we can neither detect the rude beginnings, nor hardly dare to fix on the beginners. The *Origines Typographicæ* are, even at this late hour, provoking a fierce controversy, not only among those who live in the shades of their libraries, but with honest burghers; for the glory of patriotism has connected itself with the invention of an art which came to us like a divine revelation in the history of man. But the place, the mode, and the person — the invention and the inventor — are the subjects of volumes! Votaries of Fust, of Schöffer, of Gutenberg, of Costar! a sullen silence or a deadly feud is your only response. Ye jealous cities of Mentz, of Strasburg, and of Haarlem, each of ye have your armed champion at your gates!*

* The city of Haarlem designs to erect a statue of COSTAR [since this was written, the statue has been placed in the great square]; thus publicly,

The mystical eulogist of the art of printing, who declared that "the invention came from Heaven," was not more at a loss to detect the origin than those who have sought for it among the earliest printers.* Learned but angry disputants on the origin of printing, what if the art can boast of no single inventor, and was not the product of a single act? Consider the varieties of its practice, the change of wood to metal, the fixed to the movable type; view the complexity of its machinery: repeated attempts must often have preceded so many inventions ere they terminated in the great one. From the imperfect and contradictory notices of the early essays, — and of the very earliest we may have no record, — we must infer that the art, though secret, was progressive, and that many imperfect beginnings were going on at the same time in different places.

Struck by the magnitude and the magnificence of the famous Bible of Fust, some have decided on the invention of the art by one of its most splendid results: this, however, is not in the usual course of human affairs, nor in the nature of things. "The art of Printing," observes Dr. Cotton in his introduction, "was brought almost to perfection in its infancy; so that, like Minerva, it may be said to have sprung to life, mature, vigorous, and armed for war." But in the

in the eyes of Europe, to vindicate the priority of this inventor of typography. But a statue is not the final argument, which, like the cannon of monarchs (that *ultima ratio regum*), will carry conviction on the spot it is placed. Mentz has already erected a statue of GUTENBERG. I have no doubt, that, in the present state of agitation, both these statues will have much to say to one another, as the mystical Pasquin and Marforio of typography.

* "Some Observations on the Use and Original of the noble Art and Mystery of Printing," by F. Burges. Norwich, 1701. This is declared to be the first book printed at Norwich; where it appears that the establishment of a printing-office, so late as in 1701, encountered a stern opposition from its sage citizens. The writer did not know, that, as far back as 1570, a Dutch printer had exercised the novel art by printing religious books for a community of Dutch emigrants who had taken refuge at Norwich, according to the recent discovery of Dr. Cotton, in his "Typographical Gazetteer," — a volume abounding with the most vigorous researches.

article "Moguntia, or Mentz," this acute researcher states, that, "after all that has been written with such angry feelings upon the long-contested question of the *origin of the Art of Printing*, Mentz appears still to preserve the best-founded claim to the honor of being the *birth-place of the Typographic Art;* because," he adds, "the specimens adduced in favor of Haarlem and Strasburg, even if we should allow their genuineness, are confessedly of *a rude and imperfect execution.*" We require no other evidence of the important fact, that the art, in its early stages, had to pass through many transitions,—from the small school-books, or Donatuses, of Costar, to the splendid Bible of Fust. Had the art been borrowed or stolen from a single source, according to the popular tradition, the works would have borne a more fraternal resemblance, and have evinced less inferiority of execution; but if several persons at the same time were working in secrecy, each by his own method, their differences and their inferiority would produce "the rude and imperfect specimens." Mr. Hallam has suffered his strong emotion on the greatness of the invention to reflect itself back on the humble discoverers themselves; and, unusual with his searching inquiries, calls once more on Dr. Cotton's Minerva, but with a more celestial panoply. "The *high-minded inventors* of this great art tried, at *the very outset*, so bold a flight as the printing *an entire Bible.* It was Minerva leaping on earth in her divine strength and radiant armor, ready at the moment of her nativity to subdue and destroy her enemies."* The Bible called the Mazarine Bible, thus distinguished from having been found in the cardinal's library, remains still a miracle of typography, not only for its type, but for the quality of the paper and the sparkling blackness of its ink.† The success of the art was established by this Bible; but the goldsmith Fust, who himself was no

* Hallam's "Introduction to the Literature of Europe," i. 211.

† Twenty copies of this famous Bible exist: one is preserved in our Royal Library.

printer, was no otherwise "high-minded" than by the usurious prices he speculated on for this innocent imposture of vending what was now a printed book for a manuscript copy!

No refined considerations of the nature and the universal consequences of their discovery seem to have instigated the earliest printers: this is evident by the perpetual jealousy and the mystifying style by which they long attempted to hide that secret monopoly which they had now obtained.

The first notions of printing might have reached Europe from China. Our first block-printing seems imitated from the Chinese, who print with blocks of wood on one side of the paper, as was done in the earliest essays of printing; and the Chinese seem also to have suggested the use of a thick black ink. European traders might have imported some fugitive leaves: their route has even been indicated, from Tartary, by the way of Russia; and from China and Japan, through the Indies and the Arabian Gulf. The great antiquity of printing in China has been ascertained. Du Halde and the missionary Jesuits assert that this art was practised by the Chinese half a century before the Christian era! At all events, it is evident that they exercised it many centuries before it was attempted in Europe. The history of gunpowder would illustrate the possibility of the same extraordinary invention occurring at distinct periods. Roger Bacon indicated the terrible ingredients a hundred years before the monk Schwartz, about 1330, actually struck out the fiery explosion, and had the glory of its invention. Machines to convey to a distance the thunder and the lightning described by their discoverers were not long after produced; but it would have astonished these inventors to have learnt that guns had been used as early as the year 85 A.D., and that the fatal powder had been invented previously by the Chinese. Well might the philosophical Langles be struck by "the singular coincidence of the invention in Europe of the compass, of gunpowder, and of printing, about the same period, within

a century." These three mighty agents in human affairs have been traced to that wary and literary nation, who, though they prohibit all intercourse with "any barbarian eye," might have suffered these sublime inventions to steal away over "their great wall."

What has happened to the art of printing also occurred to the sister-art of engraving on copper. Tradition had ascribed the invention as the accidental discovery of the goldsmith Maso Finiguerra. But the Germans insist that they possess engravings before the days of the Italian artist; and it is not doubtful that several of the compatriots of Finiguerra were equally practising the art with himself. Heinecken would arbitrate between the jealous patriots: he concedes that Vasari might ascribe the invention of the art in Italy to Finiguerra, yet that engraving might have been practised in Germany, though unknown in Italy. Buonarotti, the great judge of all art, was sensible, that, in this sort of invention, every artist makes his own discoveries. Alluding to the art of engraving, he says, "It would be sufficient to occasion our astonishment, that the ancients did not discover the art of chalcography, were it not known that DISCOVERIES OF THIS SORT generally occur ACCIDENTALLY to the mechanics in the exercise of their calling."* On this principle we may confidently rest. All the early printers, like the rivals of Finiguerra at home, and his unknown concurrents in Germany, were proceeding with the same art, and might urge their distinct claims.

The natural magic of concave and convex lenses, those miracles of optical science, one of which searches Nature when she eludes the eye, and the other approximates the remotest star, — the microscope and the telescope; who were their inventors? and how have those inventions happened? These instruments appeared about the same time. The Ger-

* Ottley's "Inquiry into the Early History of Engraving."

mans ascribe the invention of the microscope to a Dutchman, one Drebell; while the Neapolitan Fontana claims the anterior invention; but which Viviani, the scholar of Galileo, asserts, from his own knowledge, was presented to the King of Poland by that father of modern philosophy long anterior to the date fixed on by the Germans. The history of the telescope offers a similar result. Fracastorius may have accidentally combined two lenses; but he neither specified the form nor the quality; and in these consisted the real discovery, which we find in Baptista Porta, and which subsequently was perfected by Galileo. The invention of the art of printing seems a parallel one. It appeared in various quarters about the same time; and in the process of successive attempts, by intimation, by conjecture, and by experiment, each artificer insensibly advanced into a more perfect invention; till some fortunate claimant for the discovery puts aside all preceding essayists, who, not without some claims to the invention, leave their advocates in another generation to dispute about their rights, which are buried in oblivion, or falsified by traditional legends.

Thus it has happened that obscure traditions envelop the origin of some of the most interesting inventions. Had these ingenious discoveries been as simple and as positive as their historians oppositely maintain, these origins had not admitted of such interminable disputes. We may therefore reasonably suspect that the practitioners in every art which has reached to almost a perfect state, such as that of printing, have silently borrowed from one another; that there has often existed a secret connection in things, and a reciprocal observation in the intercourse of men alike intent on the same object; that countries have insensibly transferred a portion of their knowledge to their neighbors; that travellers in every era have imparted their novelties, hints however crude, descriptions however imperfect: all such slight notices escape the detection of an historian; nothing can reach him but the excel-

lence of some successful artist. In vain rival concurrents dispute the invention: the patriotic historian of the art clings to his people or his city, to fix the inventor and the invention, and promulgates fairy tales to authenticate the most uncertain evidence.*

The history of printing illustrates this view of its origin. The invention has been long ascribed to GUTENBERG: yet some have made it doubtful whether this presumed father of the art ever succeeded in printing a book; for we are assured that no colophon has revealed his name. We hear of his attempts and of his disappointments, his bickerings and his lawsuits. He seems to have been a speculative bungler in a new-found art, which he mysteriously hinted was to make a man's fortune. The goldsmith, Fust, advanced a capital in search of the novel alchemy: the project ends in a lawsuit; the goldsmith gains his cause, and the projector is discharged. Gutenberg lures another simple soul, and the same golden dream vanishes in the dreaming. These copartners, evidently tired of an art which had not yet found an artist, a young man, probably improving on Gutenberg's blunders, one happy day displayed to the eyes of his master, Fust, a proof pulled from his own press. In rapture, the master confers on this Peter Schœffer a share of his future fortunes; and, to bind the apprentice by the safest ties of consanguinity, led the

* Dr. WETTER, of Mentz, has lately shown, that, contrary to the common opinion, Gutenberg himself printed long with *wooden blocks;* and that, instead of the invention of movable types having been the result of long study, *it arose out of a "sudden fancy."*

How the doctor has authenticated "the sudden fancy," I know not; but the apotheosis has passed. In three successive days, in the month of August, 1837, all Mentz congregated to worship the statue, by Thorwaldsen, of their ancient citizen, in the square that henceforward bears his name. A chorus of seven hundred voices resounded the laud of the German printer; the flags in the regatta waved to his honor; and the festival rejoiced the city: and, when the figure of Gutenberg was unveiled, the artillery, the music, and the people's voices, blending together, seemed to echo in the skies.

swart youth, glorious with printer's ink, to the fair hand of his young daughter. The new partnership produced their famed Psalter of 1457; and shortly followed their magnificent Bible.

While these events were occurring, COSTAR, of Haarlem, was plodding on with the same "noble mystery," but only printing on one side of a leaf; not having yet discovered that a leaf might be contrived to contain two pages. The partisans of Costar assert that it was proved he substituted movable for fixed letters; which was a giant's footstep in this new path. A faithless servant ran off with the secret. The history of printing abounds with such tales. Every step in the progress of the newly invented art indicates its gradual accessions. The numbering of the pages was not thought of for a considerable time: the leaves were long only distinguished by letters or signatures, — a custom still preserved, though apparently superfluous.

There is something attractive for rational curiosity in the earliest beginnings of every art: every slight improvement, even though trivial, has its motive, and supplies some want. On this principle, the history of punctuation enters into the history of literature. Caxton had the merit of introducing the Roman pointing as used in Italy; and his successor, Pynson, triumphed by domiciliating the Roman letter. The dash, or perpendicular line, thus, | was the only punctuation they used. It was, however, discovered that "the craft of poynting, well used, makes the sentence very light." The more elegant comma supplanted the long, uncouth | : the colon was a refinement, "showing that there is more to come." But the semicolon was a Latin delicacy which the obtuse English typographer resisted. So late as 1580 and 1590, treatises on orthography do not recognize any such innovator; the Bible of 1592, though printed with appropriate accuracy, is without a semicolon: but in 1633 its full rights are established by Charles Butler's "English Grammar." In this

chronology of the four points of punctuation, it is evident that Shakspeare could never have used the semicolon; a circumstance which the profound George Chalmers mourns over, opining that semicolons would often have saved the poet from his commentators.

FUST had bound his workmen to secrecy by the solemnity of an oath; but, at the siege of Mentz, that freemasonry was lost. These early printers dispersed; some were even bribed away. Two Germans set up their press in the monastery of Subiaco, in the vicinity of Naples, whose confraternity consisted of German monks. These very printers finally retreated to Rome for that patronage they had still to seek; and at Rome they improved the art by adopting the Roman character. Not only the invention of the art was progressive, but the art itself was much more so.

We have other narratives of printers romantically spirited away from the parent-presses: one of the most extraordinary is the history of printing set up at Oxford, ten years before the art was practised in Europe, except at Haarlem and Mentz. Henry VI., by advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, despatched a confidential agent in disguise, under the guidance of Caxton, in his trading journeys to Flanders. The Haarlemites were so jealous of idling strangers who had come on the same insidious design, that foreigners had frequently been imprisoned.

The royal agent never ventured to enter the city; but by heavy bribes, in a secret intercourse with the workmen, one dark night he smuggled a printer aboard a vessel, and carried away Frederick Corsellis. That printer, on landing in England, was attended by a guard to Oxford. There he was constantly watched till he had revealed the mysterious craft. The evidence of this unheard-of history hinged on a record at Lambeth Palace authenticating the whole narrative, and on a monument of Corsellis's art, which any one might inspect at the Bodleian; being a book bearing a date six years prior

to any printing by Caxton. The record at Lambeth, however, was never found, and never heard of; and the date of the book might have been accidentally or designedly falsified. An *x* dropped in the date of the impression would account for the singularity of a book printed before our Caxton had acquired the art. The tale long excited a sharp controversy, when Corsellis at Oxford was considered as the first printer in England. The possibility of the existence of this person at Oxford, and even of the book he printed, appears by a lively investigation of Dr. Cotton;* and I have been assured of a circumstance, which, if true, would render the story of Corsellis probable: it is that a family of this name may still be found in Oxfordshire. The whole history has, however, by some been considered as supposititious, standing on the single evidence of a Sir Richard Atkyns, a servile lawyer and royalist, of no great character, in the days of Charles the Second.† Grafting his tale on the accident of the date of this book, he had a covert design, — to maintain a theory or a right that printing was "a flower of the crown;" constituting the sovereign the printer of England, all others being his servants! This enormous prevention of the abuses of the press was not deemed too extravagant for those desperate times.

The only certainty in the history of printing, after all the fables of its origin, is its native place. It is a German romance, enlivened by some mysterious adventures; wanting only the opening pages, which no one can supply.‡ Even

* Dr. Cotton's curious "Typographical Gazetteer," art. OXONIA. Of a class of the earliest printed books, having no printer's name, he observes, "These may have been printed by Corsellis, or any one else."

† Atkyns on the "Original and Growth of Printing." This quarto pamphlet is highly valued among collectors for Loggan's beautiful print of Charles the Second, Archbishop Shelden, and Gen. Monk. Dr. Middleton refuted this ridiculous tale of an ideal printer, one Corsellis, in his "Dissertation on the Origin of Printing in England," first published 1735, and which now may be seen in his works.

‡ The fourth day of the "Bibliographical Decameron" of Dr. Dibdin exhibits an ample view of the pending controversies on the "Origines Ty-

the most philosophic of bibliographers, Daunou, utters a cry of despair, and moreover, at this late day, seems at a loss to decide on the nature of the influence of the art of printing! "We live too near the epoch of the discovery of printing to judge accurately of its influence, and too far from it to know the circumstances which gave birth to it." Our sage seems to think that another cycle of at least a thousand years must pass away ere we can decide on the real influence of printing over the destinies of man: this new tree of knowledge bears other fruit than that of its own sweetness, source of good and evil, of sense and of nonsense, whence we pluck the windy fruitage of opinions crude and changeable!

How has it happened that such a plain story as that of the art of printing should have sunk into a romance? Solely because the monopolizers dreaded discovery. It originated in deception, and could only flourish for their commercial spirit in mysterious obscurity. Among the first artisans of printing, every one sought to hide his work, and even to blind the workmen. After their operations, they cautiously unscrewed the four sides of their forms, and threw the scattered type beneath; for, as one craftily observed to his partner, "when the component parts of the press are in pieces, no one will understand what they mean." One of the early printers of the fifteenth century at Mutina, or Modena, professes his press to have been *in ædibus subterraneis;* doubtless, if possible, still further to darken the occult mystery. They delivered themselves in a mystical style when they alluded to their unnamed art, and impressed on the marvelling reader that the volume he held in his hand was the work of some supernatural agency. They announced that the volumes in this newly found art were "neither drawn, nor written with a pen and ink, as all books before had been." In the "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," our honest printer, plain Caxton, caught

pographicæ." Every bibliographer has his favorite hero. The reader will observe that I have none; and yet possibly my tale may be the truest.

the hyperbolical style of the dark monopolizing spirit of the confraternity. I give his words, having first spelt them: "I have practised and learned at my great charge, and dispense to ordain (put in order) this said book in print after the manner and form as ye may here see; and is not written with pen and ink as other books be, to the end that *every man may have them* AT ONCE: for all the books of this story, thus imprinted as ye see, were *begun in one day, and also finished in one day.*" A volume of more than seven hundred folio pages, "begun and finished in one day," was not the less marvellous for being impossible. But for the times was the style! Caxton would keep up the wonder and the mystery of an art which men did not yet comprehend; and because a whole sheet might have been printed in one day, and was *all at once* pulled off, and not line by line, our venerable printer mystified the world. And all this was said at a time when so slow was the process of transcription, that one hundred Bibles could not be procured under the expense of seven thousand days, or of nearly twenty years' labor. Honest men, too eager in their zeal, particularly when their personal interests are at stake, sometimes strain truth on the tenter-hooks of fiction. The false miracle which our primeval printer professed he had performed, we seem to have realized: it is amusing to conceive the wonderment of Caxton, were he now among us, to view the steam working that cylindrical machine which disperses the words of a speaker throughout the whole nation, when the voice which uttered them is still lingering on our ear!

THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTER.

The ambitious wars of a potent aristocracy inflicted on this country half a century of public misery. Our fields were a soil of blood; and maternal England long mourned for victories she obtained over her own children, — lord against lord, brother against brother, and the son against the father. Rival administrations alternately dispossess each other by sanguinary conflict; a new monarch attaints the friends of his predecessor; conspiracy rises against conspiracy, scaffold against scaffold; the king is re-enthroned, — the king perishes in the Tower; York is triumphant, and York is annihilated.

Few great families there were who had not immolated their martyrs or their victims; and it frequently occurred, that the same family had fallen equally on both sides; for it was a war of the aristocracy with the aristocracy: "Save the commons, and kill the captains!" was the general war-cry. The distracted people were perhaps indifferent to the varying fortunes of the parties, accustomed as they were to behold after each battle the heads of lords and knights raised on every bridge and gate.

During this dread interval, all things about us were thrown back into a state of the rudest infancy: the illiterature of the age approached to barbarism; the evidences of history were destroyed; there was such a paucity of readers, that no writers were found to commemorate contemporary events. Indeed, had there been any, who could have ventured to arbitrate between such contradictory accounts, where every party had

to tell their own tale? Oblivion, not history, seemed to be the consolation of those miserable times.

It was at such an unhappy era that the new-found art of printing was introduced into England by an English trader, who for thirty years had passed his life in Flanders, conversant with no other languages than were used in those countries.

Our literature was interested in the intellectual character of our first English printer. A powerful mind might, by the novel and mighty instrument of thought, have created a national taste, or have sown that seed of curiosity without which no knowledge can be reared. Such a genius might have anticipated by a whole century that general passion for sound literature which was afterwards to distinguish our country. But neither the times nor the man were equal to such a glorious advancement.

The first printed book in the English language was not printed in England. It is a translation of Ráoul le Fevre's "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," famed in its own day as the most romantic history; and in ours, for the honor of bibliography, romantically valued at the cost of a thousand guineas. This first monument of English printing issued from the infant press at Cologne in 1471, where Caxton first became initiated in "the noble mystery and craft" of printing, when printing was yet truly "a mystery;" and Caxton himself did not import the art which was to effect such an intellectual revolution till a year or two afterwards, on his return home. The first printer, it is evident, had no other conception of the machine he was about to give the nation than as an ingenious contrivance, or a cheap substitute for costly manuscripts: possibly he might, in his calculating prudence, even be doubtful of its success!

At the announcement of the first printed book in our vernacular idiom, the mind involuntarily pauses: looking on the humble origin of our bibliography, and on the obscure com-

mencement of the newly found art of printing itself, we are startled at the vast and complicated results.

The contemporaries of our first printer were not struck by their novel and precious possession, of which they participated in the first-fruits in the circulation and multiplication of their volumes. The introduction of the art into England is wholly unnoticed by the chroniclers of the age, so unconscious they were of this new implement of the human mind. We find Fabian, who must have known Caxton personally, — both being members of the Mercers' Company, — passing unnoticed his friend; and, instead of any account of the printing-press, we have only such things as "a new weathercock placed on the cross of St. Paul's steeple." Hall, so copious in curious matters, discovered no curiosity to memorialize in the printing-press; Grafton was too heedless; and Holinshed, the most complete of our chroniclers, seems to have had an intention of saying something by his insertion of a single line, noticing the name of "Caxton as the first practiser of the art of printing;" but he was more seriously intent in the same paragraph to give a narrative of "a bloody rain, the red drops falling on the sheets which had been hanged to dry." The history of printing in England has been vainly sought for among English historians; so little sensible were they to those expansive views and elevated conceptions which are now too commonplace eulogies to repeat.

By what subdolous practices among the first inventors of this secret art Caxton obtained its mastery, we are not told, except that he learnt the new art "at his own great cost and expense;" and, on his final return home, he was accompanied by foreigners who lived in his house, and after his death became his successors. Wynkyn de Worde, Pynson, Machlinia, and others, by their names betray their German origin. We have recently discovered that we had even a French printer who printed English books. Francis Regnault (or Reynold, Anglicized) was a Frenchman, who fell under the displeasure

of the Inquisition for printing the Bible in English. He resided in England, and had in hand a number of primers in English, and other similar books, which at length excited the jealousy of *the Company of Booksellers in London*, in the reign of Henry the Eighth. To allay this bibliopolic storm, the affrighted French printer, with all his stock in hand, procured Coverdale and Grafton to intercede with Cromwell to grant him a license to sell what he had already printed, engaging hereafter "to print no more in the *English tongue* unless he have an *Englishman* that is learned to be his corrector;" and, further, he offers to cancel and reprint any faulty leaf again.*

Caxton did not extend his views beyond those of a mercantile printer and an indifferent translator. As a writer, Caxton had reason to speak with humility of the style of his vernacular versions. His patroness, the Lady Margaret, sister to our Edward the Fourth, and Duchess of Burgundy, after inspecting some quires of his translation of the "Recuyel of the Historyes of Troye," returned them; finding, as Caxton ingenuously acknowledges, "some defaut in his English, which she commanded him to amend." Tyrwhit sarcastically observes, that the duchess might have been a purist. As we are not told what were these "defauts," we cannot decide on the good taste or the fastidiousness of the sister of Edward the Fourth. But the duchess was not the only critic whom Caxton had to encounter; for we learn by his preface to his "Boke of Æneydos compiled by Virgil," now metamorphosed into a barbarous French prose romance, and the French translation translated, that there were "gentlemen who of late have blamed me, that in my translations I had over-curious terms which could not be understood by common people. I fain would satisfy every man." He apologizes for his own style by alleging the unsettled state of the

* "State Papers of Henry the Eighth," vol. i. 589.

English language, of which he tells us that "the language now used varieth far from that which was used and spoken when I was born." An absence of thirty years from his native land did not improve a diction which originally had been none of the purest. We find in his translations an abundance of pure French words; and it is remarkable that the printer of the third edition of the Troy history, in 1607, altered whole sentences "into plainer English;" alleging, "the translator, William Caxton, being, *as it seemeth*, no Englishman!"

The "curious" prices now given among the connoisseurs of our earliest typography for their "Caxtons," as his Gothic works are thus honorably distinguished, have induced some, conforming to traditional prejudice, to appreciate by the same fanciful value "the Caxtonian style." But though we are not acquainted with the "defauts" which offended the Lady Margaret, nor with the "terms which were not easily understood," as alleged by "the gentlemen," nor with "the sentences improperly Englished," as the later printer declared, we shall not, I suspect, fall short of the mark if we conclude that the style of a writer destitute of a literary education, a prolix genius with a lax verbosity, and almost a foreigner in his native idiom, could not attain to any skill or felicity in the maternal tongue.

As a printer, without erudition, Caxton would naturally accommodate himself to the tastes of his age; and it was therefore a consequence, that no great author appears among "the Caxtons." The most glorious issues of his press were a Chaucer and a Gower, wherein he was simply a printer. The rest of his works are translations of fabulous histories, and those spurious writings of the monkish ages ascribed by ignorant transcribers to some ancient sage. He appears frequently to have been at a loss what book to print, and to have accidentally chosen the work in hand: so he tells us, "Having no work in hand, I sitting in my study, where as lay many diverse paunflettes and bookys, happened that to my

hand came a lytel boke in French, which late was translated out of Latin by some noble clerk of France, which book is named Æneydos." And this was the origin of his puerile romance! He exercised no discrimination in his selection of authors, and the simplicity of our first printer far exceeded his learning. One of his greater works is "the noble History of King Arthur and of certain of his Knights." Caxton, who had charmed himself and his ignorant readers with his authentic "Æneydos," hesitated to print "this history;" for there were different opinions that "there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as be made of him be but feigned and fables." It would be difficult to account for the scepticism of one who always found the marvellous more delectable than the natural, and who had published so many "feigned" histories, — as "the veray trew History of the valiant Knight Jason," or the "Life of Hercules," and all "the Merveilles of Virgil's Necromancy," — solemnly vouching for their verity! His sudden scruples were, however, relieved, when "a gentleman" assured our printer that "it was great folly and blindness in the disbelievers of this true history."

In the early stage of civilization, men want knowledge to feel any curiosity: like children, they are only affected through the medium of their imagination. But it is a phenomenon in the history of the human mind, that at a period of refinement we may approximate to one of barbarism. This happens when the ruling passion wholly returns to fiction, and thus terminates in a reckless disregard for all other studies. Whenever history, severe and lofty, displaying men as they are, is degraded among the revels and the masques of romance; and the slow inductions of reasoning, and the minute discoveries of research, and the nice affinities of analogy, are impatiently rejected, while Fiction in her exaggerated style swells every object into a colossal size, and raises every passion into hyperbolical violence, — a distaste for knowledge, and a coldness for truth, which must follow, are fatal to the sanity

of the intellect. And thus, in the day of our refinement, we may be reverting to our barbarous infancy.

Caxton, mindful of his commercial interests and the taste of his readers, left the glory of restoring the classical writers of antiquity, which he could not read, to the learned printers of Italy.* The Orator of Cicero, the histories of Herodotus and Polybius, the ethics of Seneca, and the elaborate volumes of St. Austin, were some of the rich fruits of the early typography of the German printers who had conveyed their new art to the Neapolitan monastery of Subiaco. Our English printer, indeed, might have heard of their ill fortune, when, in a petition to the pope, they sent forth this cry: "Our house is full of proof-sheets; but we have nothing to eat!" The trivial productions from Caxton's press, romantic or religious legends, and treatises on hunting and hawking, and the moralities of the game of chess, with Reynard the Fox, were more amusing to the ignorant readers of his country: but the national genius was little advanced by a succession of "merveillous workes;" nor would the crude, unformed tastes of the readers be matured by stimulating their inordinate appetites. The first printing-press in England did not serve to raise the national taste out of its barbarous infancy. Caxton was not a genius to soar beyond his age; but he had the industry to keep pace with it; and with little judgment, and less learning, he found no impediment in his selection of authors or his progress in translation.

Our earliest printed works consist of these translations of French translations; and the historian of our poetry considered that this very circumstance, which originated in the

* We have Caxton's own confession in his preface to "the Book of Æneydos," or the "Æneid" of Virgil, where, in soliciting the late-created poet-laureate in the University of Oxford, John Skelton, to oversee his prose translation of the French translation, he notices the translations of Skelton of "the Epistles of Tully," and the "History of Diodorus Siculus," *out of Latin into English*, and as "one that had read Virgil, Ovid, Tully, and all the other noble poets and orators to *me unknown*."

general illiteracy of the times, was more favorable to our vernacular literature than would have been the publication of Roman writers in their original language. Had it not been for these French versions, Caxton could not have furnished any of his own. The multiplication of English copies multiplied English readers; and when, at length, there was a generation of readers, an English press induced many to turn authors who were only qualified to write in their native tongue.

Venerable shade of Caxton! the award of the tribunal of posterity is a severe decision, but an imprescriptible law. Men who appear at certain eras of society, however they be lauded for what they have done, are still liable to be censured for not doing what they ought to have done. Patriarch of the printing-press, who to thy last and dying day withdrew not thy hand from thy work! it is hard that thou shouldst be amenable to a law which thy faculties were not adequate to comprehend: surely thou mayst triumph, thou simple man! amid the echoes of thy "Caxtonians" rejoicing over thy Gothic leaves; but the historian of the human mind is not the historian of typography.

EARLY LIBRARIES.

THERE probably was a time when there existed no private libraries in the kingdom, nor any save the monastic: that of Oxford, at the close of the thirteenth century, consisted of "a few tracts kept in chests." In that primeval age of book-collecting, shelves were not yet required. Royalty itself seems to have been destitute of a royal library. It appears, by one of our recently published records, that King John borrowed a volume from a rich abbey; and the king gave a receipt to Simon his chancellor for "the book called Pliny," which had been in the custody of the Abbot and Convent of Reading. "The Romance of the History of England," with other volumes, have also royal receipts. The king had either deposited these volumes for security with the abbot, or, what seems not improbable, had no established collection which could be deemed a library; and, as leisure or curiosity stimulated, commanded the loan of a volume.

The borrowing of a volume was a serious concern in those days, and heavy was the pledge or the bond required for the loan. One of the regulations of the library of the Abbey of Croyland, Ingulphus has given. It regards "the lending of their books, as well the smaller without pictures as the larger with pictures:" any loan is forbidden under no less a penalty than that of excommunication, which might possibly be a severer punishment than the gallows.

Long after this period, our English libraries are said to have been smaller than those on the Continent; and yet, one century and a half subsequently to the reign of John, the

royal library of France, belonging to a monarch who loved literature, Jean le Bon, did not exceed ten volumes. In those days, they had no idea of establishing a library: the few volumes which each monarch collected at great cost were always dispersed by gifts or bequests at their death: nothing passed to their successor but the missals, the *heures*, and the *offices* of their chapels. These monarchs of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, amid the prevailing ignorance of the age, had not advanced in their comprehension of the uses of a permanent library beyond their great predecessor of the ninth; for Charlemagne had ordered his books to be sold after his death, and the money given to the poor.

Yet, among these early French kings, there were several who were lovers of books, and were not insensible of the value of a studious intercourse, anxious to procure transcribers and translators. A curious fact has been recorded of St. Louis, that during his crusade in the East, having learned that a Saracen prince employed scribes to copy the best writings of philosophy for the use of students, on his return to France he adopted the same practice, and caused the Scriptures and the works of the Fathers to be transcribed from copies found in different abbeys. These volumes were deposited in a secure apartment, to which the learned might have access; and he himself passed much of his time there, occupied in his favorite study, — the writings of the Fathers.*

Charles Le Sage, in 1373, had a considerable library, amounting to nine hundred volumes. He placed this collection in one of the towers of the Louvre, hence denominated the "Tour de la Librarie;" and intrusted it to the custody of his valet-de-chambre, Gilles Malet, constituting him his librarian.† He was no common personage; for, great as was the

* "Essai Historique sur la Bibliothèque du Roi," par M. Le Prince.

† This Gilles Malet, who was also the king's reader, had great strength of character. He is thus described by Christine de Pise: "Souverainement bien lisoit, et bien ponttoit, et entendens homs estoit," — "He read

care and ingenuity required, he drew up an inventory with his own hand of this royal library. In that early age of book-collecting, volumes had not always titles to denote their subjects, or they contained several in one volume:* hence they are described by their outsides, their size and their shape, their coverings and their clasps. This library of Charles the Fifth shines in extreme splendor, with its many-colored silks and velvets, azure and vermeil, green and yellow, and its cloths of silver and of gold, each volume being distinctly described by the color and the material of its covering. This curious document of the fourteenth century still exists.†

This library passed through strange vicissitudes. The volumes in the succeeding reigns were seized on, or purchased at a conqueror's price, by the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France. Some he gave to his brother Humphrey, the Duke of Gloucester; and they formed a part of the rich collection which that prince presented to Oxford, there finally to be destroyed by a fanatical English mob: others of the volumes found their way back to the Louvre, repurchased by the French at London. The glorious missal that bears the regent's name remains yet in this country, the property of a wealthy individual.‡

sovereignly well, with good punctuation, and was an understanding man." She has recorded a personal anecdote of him. One day, a fatal accident happened to his child; but such was the discipline of official duties, that he did not interrupt his attendance on the king at the usual hour of reading. The king, having afterwards heard of the accident which had bereaved the father of his child, observed, "If the intrepidity of this man had not exceeded that which Nature bestows upon ordinary men, his paternal emotion would not have allowed him to conceal his misfortune."

* The reader may form some idea of the discordant arrangement of a volume of manuscripts by the following entries: "Un Livre qui commence de Genesis, et aussi traite des fais Julius Cesar, appelle Suetoine." "Un Livre en François, en un volume, qui ce commence de Genesis, et traite du fait des Romains, de la vie des SS. Peres Hermites, et de Merlin."

† "Hist. de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions," tome i. 421, 12mo.

‡ It has, within the last few years, been added to the British Museum.—Ed.

Accident has preserved a few catalogues of libraries of noblemen in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, more pleasant than erudite. In the fourteenth century, the volumes consisted for the greater part of those romances of chivalry which so long formed the favorite reading of the noble, the dame, and the damoiselle, and all the lounging damoiseaux in the baronial castle.*

The private libraries of the fifteenth century were restricted to some French tomes of chivalry, or to "a merrie tale in Boccace;" and their science advanced not beyond "the Shepherd's Calendar," or "the Secrets of Albert the Great." There was an intermixture of legendary lives of saints, and apocryphal adventures of "Notre Seigneur" in Egypt, with a volume or two of physic and surgery and astrology.

A few catalogues of our monastic libraries still remain, and these reflect an image of the studies of the middle ages. We find versions of the Scriptures in English and Latin, — a Greek or Hebrew manuscript is not noted down; a commentator, a father, and some schoolmen; and a writer on the canon law, and the mediæval Christian poets who composed in Latin verse. A romance, an accidental classic, a chronicle and legends, — such are the usual contents of these monastic catalogues. But, though the subjects seem various, the number of volumes were exceedingly few. Some monasteries had not more than twenty books. In such little esteem were any writings in the vernacular idiom held, that the library of Glastonbury Abbey, probably the most extensive in England, in 1248, possessed no more than four books in English,† on religious topics; and in the later days of Henry the Eighth,

* *Dame* was the lady of the knight; the *damoiselle*, the wife of an esquire; *dameisel*, or *damoiseau*, was a youth of noble extraction, but who had not yet attained to knighthood. — ROCQUEFORT: *Glossaire de Langue Romane.*

† Ritson's "Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy," lxxxi.

when Leland rummaged the monasteries, he did not find a greater number. The library of the Monastery of Bretton, which, owing to its isolated site, was among the last dissolved, and which may have enlarged its stores with the spoils of other collections which the times offered, when it was dissolved in 1558, could only boast of having possessed one hundred and fifty distinct works.*

In this primitive state of book-collecting, a singular evidence of their bibliographical passion was sometimes apparent in the monastic libraries. Not deeming a written catalogue, which might not often be opened, sufficiently attractive to remind them of their lettered stores, they inscribed verses on their windows to indicate the books they possessed, and over these inscriptions they placed the portraits of the authors. Thus they could not look through their windows without being reminded of their volumes; and the very portraits of authors, illuminated by the light of heaven, might rouse the curiosity which many a barren title would repel.†

To us, accustomed to reckon libraries by thousands, these scanty catalogues will appear a sad contraction of human knowledge. The monastic studies could not in any degree have advanced the national character; they could only have kept it stationary; and excepting some scholastic logomachies, in which the people could have no concern, one monkish writer could hardly ever have differed from another.

The monastic libraries have been declared to have afforded the last asylums of literature in a barbarous era, and the preservation of ancient literature has been ascribed to the monks. But we must not accept a fortuitous occurrence as any evidence of their solicitude or their taste. In the dull

* See an "Essay on English Monastic Libraries" by that learned and ingenious antiquary, the Rev. Joseph Hunter.

† Some of these extraordinary window-catalogues of the monastic library of St. Alban's were found in the cloisters and presbytery of that monastery, and are preserved in the "Monasticon Anglicanum."

scriptorium of the monk, if the ancient authors always obtained so secure a place, they slept in comparative safety; for they were not often disturbed by their first Gothic owners, who hardly ever allude to them. If ancient literature found a refuge in the monastic establishments, the polytheistical guests were not slightly contemned by their hosts, who cherished with a different taste a bastardized race of the Romans. The purer writers were not in request; for, the later Latin verse-makers being Christians, the piety of the monks proved to be infinitely superior to their taste. Boethius was their great classic; while Prudentius, Sedulius, and Fortunius carried the votes against Virgil, Horace, and even Ovid; though Ovid was in some favor for his marvellous romance. The polytheism of the classical poets was looked on with horror, so literally did they construe the allegorical fables of the Latin Muse. Even till a later day, when monkery itself was abolished, the same Gothic taste lingered among us in its aversion to the classical poets of antiquity, as the works of idolaters!

Had we not obtained our knowledge of the great ancients by other circumstances than by their accidental preservation by the monks, we should have lost a whole antiquity. The vellum was considered more precious than the genius of the author; and it has been acutely conjectured, that the real cause of the minor writers of antiquity having come down to us entire, while we have to lament for ever the lacerations of the greater, has been owing to the scantiness of the parchment of a diminutive volume. They coveted the more voluminous authors to erase some immortal page of the lost decades of Livy, or the annals of Tacitus, to inscribe on it some dull homily or saintly legend. That the ancients were neglected by these guardians, appears by the dungeon-darkness from which the Italian Poggio disinterred many of our ancient classics; and Leland, in his literary journey to survey the monastic libraries of England, often shook from the unknown author a whole century of dust and cobwebs. When libraries

became one source of the pleasures of life, the lovers of books appear to have been curious in selecting their site for perfect seclusion and silence amid their noble residences; and also in their contrivances to arrange their volumes, so as to have them at instant command. One of these Gothic libraries, in an old castle belonging to the Percys, has been described by Leland with congenial delight. I shall transcribe his words, accommodating the reader with our modern orthography: —

"One thing I liked extremely in one of the towers: that was a STUDY called PARADISE; where was a closet in the middle of eight squares latticed 'abrate;' and at the top of every square was a desk ledged to set books on, on coffers within them; and these seemed as joined hard to the top of the closet; and yet, by pulling, one or all would come down breast-high in rabbets (or grooves), and serve for desks to lay books on."

However clumsy this invention in "Paradise" may seem to us, it was not more so than the custom of chaining their books to the shelves, allowing a sufficient length of chain to reach the reading-desk; a mode which long prevailed when printing multiplied the cares of the librarian.

All these libraries, consisting of manuscripts, were necessarily limited in their numbers: their collectors had no choice, but gladly received what occurred to their hands. It was when books were multiplied by the press, that the minds of owners of libraries shaped them to their own fancies, and stamped their characters on these companions of their solitude.

We have a catalogue of the library of Mary, Queen of Scots, as delivered up to her son, James the Sixth, in 1578,* very characteristic of her elegant studies: the volumes chiefly consist of French authors and French translations; a variety of chronicles; several romances; a few Italian writers, — Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto; and her favorite poets, Alain

* Dibdin's "Bibliographical Decameron," iii. 245.

Chartier, Ronsard, and Marot. This library forms a striking contrast with that of Elizabeth of England, which was visited in 1598 by Hentzner, the German traveller. The shelves at Whitehall displayed a more classical array: the collection consisted of Greek, Latin, as well as Italian and French books.

The dearness of parchment, and the slowness of the scribes, made manuscripts things only purchasable by princely munificence. It was the discovery of paper from rags, and the novel art of taking copies without penmen, which made books mere objects of commerce, and dispersed the treasures of the human mind free as air, and cheap as bread.

HENRY THE SEVENTH.

THERE was a state of transition in our literature, both classical and vernacular, which deserves our notice in the progress of the genius of the nation.

A prudent sovereign in the seventh Henry, amid factions rather joined together than cemented, gave a semblance of repose to a turbulent land exhausted by its convulsions. A martial rudeness still lingered among the great; and we discover by a curious conversation which the learned Pace held with some of the gentry, — with whom, perhaps, he had indiscreetly remonstrated, attempting to impress on their minds the advantages of study, — that his advice was indignantly rejected. Such pursuits seemed to them unmanly, and intolerable impediments in the practice of those more active arts of life which alone were worthy of one of gentle blood: their fathers had been good knights without this idling toil of reading.

Henry the Seventh, when Earl of Richmond, during his exile in France from 1471 to 1485, had become a reader of French romances, an admirer of French players, and an amateur of their peculiar architecture. After his accession, we trace these new tastes in our poetry, our drama, and in a novel species of architecture which Bishop Fox called Burgundian, and which is the origin of the Tudor style.* A favorer of the histrionic art, he introduced a troop of French players. Wary in his pleasures as in his politics, this mon-

* Speed's "History," 995.

arch was moderate in his patronage either of poets or players; but he was careful to encourage both. The queen participated in his tastes, and appears to have bestowed particular rewards on "players," whose performances had afforded her unusual delight; and, among the curious items of her majesty's expenditure, we find that many of these players were foreigners, — "a French player, an Italian poet, a Spanish tumbler, a Flemish tumbler, a Welshman for making a rhyme, a maid that came out of Spain and danced before the queen."

This monarch had suffered one of those royal marriages which are a tribute paid to the interests of the State. Henry had yielded with repugnance to a union with Elizabeth the Yorkist: the sullen Lancastrian long looked on his queen with the eyes of a factionist. Toward the latter years of his life, this repugnance seems to have passed away, as this gentle consort largely participated in his tastes. It was probably in their sympathy that the personal prejudices of Henry melted away. This indeed was a triumph of the arts of imagination over the warped feelings of the individual; it marked the transition from barbaric arms to the amenities of literature, and the softening influence of the mimetic arts; it was the presage of the magnificence of his successor. The nation was benefited by these new tastes: the pacific reign made a revolution in our court, our manners, and our literature.

We may date from this period that happy intercourse which the learned English opened with the Continent, and more particularly with literary Italy. Our learned travellers now appear in number. Colet, the founder of St. Paul's School, not only passed over to Paris, but lingered in Italy, and returned home with the enthusiasm of classical antiquity. Grocyn, to acquire the true pronunciation of the Greek, which he first taught at Oxford, domesticated with Demetrius Chalcondyles and Angelo Politian at Florence. Linacre, the projector of the College of Physicians, visited Rome and Florence. Lilly, the grammarian, we find at Rhodes and at

Rome; and the learned Pace at Padua. We were thus early great literary travellers; and the happier Continentalists, who rarely move from their native homes, have often wondered at the restless condition of those whom they have sometimes reproached as being *Insulaires:* yet they may be reminded that we have done no more than the most ancient philosophers of antiquity. Our reproachers fortunately possessed the arts, and even the learning, which we were willing by travel and costs to acquire. "The Islanders" may have combined all the knowledge of all the world, a freedom and enlargement of the mind, which those, however more fortunately placed, can rarely possess, who restrict their locality and narrow their comprehension by their own home-bound limits.

The king, delighting in poetry, fostered an English Muse in the learned rhyme of STEPHEN HAWES, who was admitted to his private chamber for the pleasure which Henry experienced in listening to poetic recitation. It was probably the taste of his royal master which inspired this bard's allegorical romance of chivalry, of love, and of science. This elaborate work is "the Pastime of Pleasure, or the History of Graunde Amour and la bell Pucell, containing the knowledge of the seven sciences and the course of man's life." At a time when sciences had no reality, they were constantly alluding to them; ignorance hardily imposed its erudition; and experimental philosophy only terminated in necromancy. The seven sciences of the accomplished gentleman were those so well known, comprised in the scholastic distich.

In the ideal hero, "Graunde Amour," is shadowed forth the education of a complete gentleman of that day. From the Tower of "Doctrine" to the Castle of "Chivalry," the way lies equally open; but the progress is diversified by many by-paths, and a number of personified ideas or allegorical characters. These shadowy actors lead to shadowy places; but the abounding incidents relieve us among this troop of passionless creatures.

This fiction blends allegory with romance, and science with chivalry. At the early period of printing, it was probably the first volume which called in the graver's art to heighten the inventions of the writer; and the accompanying wood-cuts are an evidence of the elegant taste of the author, although that morose critic of all poesy, honest Anthony à Wood, sarcastically concludes that these cuts were "to enable the reader to understand the story better." This once courtly volume, our sage reports, "is now thought but worthy of a ballad-monger's stall."* "The Pastime of Pleasure" was even despised by that great book-collector, Gen. Lord Fairfax, who, on the copy he possessed, has left a memorandum, "that it should be changed for a better book!" The fate of books vacillates with the fancies of book-lovers and the improvements of a later age. In the days of Fairfax, the gloom of the civil wars annihilated their imaginations.

But the gorgeousness of this romance struck the Gothic fancy of the historian of our poetry, magic, chivalry, and allegory. In the circumstantial analysis of Warton, the reader may pursue his "course of man's life" through the windings of the labyrinth. It seems as if the patience of the critic had sought a relief, amid his prolonged chronicle of obscure versifiers, in a production of imagination, the only

* This forlorn volume of Anthony's "Stalls" is now a gem placed in the caskets of black-letter. This poetic romance, by its excessive rarity, — the British Museum is without a copy, — has obtained most extraordinary prices among our collectors. A copy of the first edition at the Roxburgh sale reached £84, which was sold at Sir M. M. Sykes's for half the price; later editions, for a fourth. A copy was sold at Heber's sale for £25. It may, however, relieve the distress of some curious readers to be informed that it may now be obtained at the most ordinary cost of books. Mr. SOUTHEY, with excellent judgment, has preserved the romance in his valuable volume of "Specimens of our Ancient Poets" from the time of Chaucer. It is to be regretted, however, that the text is not correctly printed, and that the poem has suffered mutilation: six thousand lines seem to have exhausted the patience of the modern typographer. [A more perfect and accurate edition, from that printed in 1555, was published by the Percy Society, in 1845, under the editorship of Mr. Thomas Wright.]

one which had appeared since Chaucer, and which, to the contemplative poetic antiquary, showed him the infant rudiments of the future Spenser.

This allegorical romance is imbued with Provençal fancy, and probably emulated the "Roman de la Rose," which could not fail to be a favorite with the royal patron, among those French books which he loved. Fertile in invention, it is, however, of the old stock, — fresh meads and delicious gardens; ladies in arbors; magical trials of armed knights on horses of steel, which, touched by a secret spring, could represent a tourney. We strike the shield at the castle-gate of chivalry; and we view the golden roof of the hall, lighted up by a carbuncle of prodigious size; we repose in chambers walled with silver, and enamelling many a story. There are many noble conceptions among the allegorical gentry. She whom Graunde Amour first beheld was mounted on her palfrey, flying with the wind, encircled with tongues of fire, and her two milk-white greyhounds, on whose golden collars are inscribed, in diamond letters, *Grace* and *Governance*. She is Fame, her palfrey is Pegasus, and her burning tongues are the voice of Posterity! There are some grotesque incidents, as in other romances; a monster wildly created, the offspring of Disdain and Strangeness, — a demon composed of the seven metals! We have also a dwarf, who has to encounter a giant with seven heads; our subdolous David mounts on twelve steps cut in the rock; and, to the surprise of the giant, he discovered in "the boy whom he had mocked" his equal in stature, and his vanquisher, notwithstanding the inconceivable roar of his seven heads!

Warton transcribed a few lines to show this poet's "harmonious versification and clear expression;" but this short specimen may convey an erroneous notion. Our verse was yet irregular, and its modulation was accidental rather than settled. The metrical lines of Hawes, for the greater part, must be read rhythmically: it was a barbarism that even later

poets still retained. He also affected an ornate diction; and Latin and French terms cast an air of pedantry, more particularly when the euphony of his verse is marred by closing his lines with his elongated polysyllables: he probably imagined that the dimensions of his words necessarily lent a grandeur to his thoughts. With all these defects, Hawes often surpasses himself; and we may be surprised, that in a poem composed in the court of Henry the Seventh, about 1506, the poet should have left us such a minutely finished picture of female beauty as he has given of La Pucelle. Hawes had been in Italy, and seems with an artist's eye to have dwelt on some picture of Raphael, in his early manner; or of his master Perugino, in his hard but elaborate style.

"Her shining hair, so properly she dresses,
Aloft her forehead, with fayre golden tresses;
Her forehead stepe, with fayre browés ybent;
Her eyen gray; her nosé straight and fayre;
In her white cheeks, the faire bloudé it went
As among the white, the reddé to repayre;
Her mouthe right small; her breathe sweet of ayre;
Her lippes soft and ruddy as a rose;
No hart alive but it would him appose.
With a little pitte in her well-favoured chynne;
Her necke long, as white as any lillye,
With vaynés blewe, in which the bloude ranne in;
Her pappés rounde, and thereto right pretýe;
Her armés slender, and of goodly bodýe;
Her fingers small, and thereto right longe,
White as the milk, with blewé vaynes among;
Her feet propér; she gartred well her hose.
I never sawe so fayre a créatúre."

The reign of Henry the Seventh was a misty morning of our vernacular literature, but it was the sunrise; and, though the road be rough, we discover a few names by which we may begin to count, as we find on our way a mile-stone, which, however rudely cut, and worn out, serves to measure our distances.

FIRST SOURCES OF MODERN HISTORY.

SOCIETY must have considerably advanced ere it could have produced an historical record; and who could have furnished even the semblance but the most instructed class, in the enjoyment of uninterrupted leisure, among every people? History, therefore, remained long a consecrated thing in the hands of the priesthood, from the polytheistical era of the Roman pontiffs, who registered their annals, to the days that the history of Christian Europe became chronicled by the monastic orders.* Had it not been for the monks, exclaimed our learned Marsham, we should not have had a history of England.

The monks provided those chronicles which have served both for the ecclesiastical and civil histories of every European people. In every abbey, the most able of its inmates, or the abbot himself, was appointed to record every considerable transaction in the kingdom, and sometimes extended their views to foreign parts. All these were set down in a volume reserved for this purpose; and, on the decease of every sovereign, these memorials were laid before the general chapter, to draw out a sort of chronological history, occasionally with

* Archbishop Plegmund superintended the Saxon Annals to the year 891. The first Chronicles, those of Kent or Wessex, were regularly continued by the Archbishops of Canterbury, or by their directions, as far as 1000, or even 1070.—*The Rev. Dr. Ingram's Preface to the Saxon Chronicle.*

These were our earliest Chronicles: the Britons possibly never wrote any.

a random comment, as the humor of the scribe prompted, or the opinions of the whole monastery sanctioned.

Besides these meagre annals, the monasteries had other books more curious than their record of public affairs. These were their leiger-books, of which some have escaped among the few relics of the universal dissolution of the monasteries. In these registers or diaries they entered all matters relating to their own monastery and its dependencies. As time never pressed on the monkish secretary, his *notabilia* runs on very miscellaneously. Here were descents of families, and tenures of estates; authorities of charters and of cartularies; curious customs of counties, cities, and great towns. Strange accidents were not uncommon then; and sometimes, between a miracle or a natural phenomenon, a fugitive anecdote stole in. The affairs of a monastery exhibited a moving picture of domestic life. These religious houses, whose gate opened to the wayfarer, and who were the distributers of useful commodities to the neighboring poor, — for in their larger establishments they included workmen of every class, — did not, however, maintain their munificence untainted by mundane passions. Forged charters had often sealed their possessions, and supposititious grants of mortuary donations silently transferred the wealth of families. These lords of the soil, though easy landlords, still cast an "evil eye" on the lands of their neighbor. Even rival monasteries have fought in meadows for the ownership: the stratagems of war and the battle-array of two troops of cudgelling monks might have furnished some cantos to an epic, less comic, perhaps, than that of "the Rape of the Bucket."

In the literary simplicity of the twelfth to the fourteenth century, while every great monastery had its historian, every chronicle derived its title from its locality; thus, among others, were the Glastonbury, the Peterborough, and the Abingdon Chronicles: and when Leland, so late as the reign of Henry the Eighth, in his search into monastic libraries, dis-

covered one at St. Neot's, he was at a loss to describe it otherwise than as "the Chronicle of St. Neot's." The famous Doomsday Book was originally known as "Liber de Winton," or "the Winchester Book," from its first place of custody. The same circumstance occurred among our neighbors, where *Les grandes Chroniques de Saint Denys* were so called from having been collected or compiled by the monks of that abbey. An abstract notion of history, or any critical discrimination of one chronicle from another, was not as yet familiar even to our scholars; and, in the dearth of literature, the classical models of antiquity were yet imperfectly contemplated.

It is not less curious to observe, that, at a time when the literary celebrity of the monachal scribe could hardly pass the boundaries of the monastery, and the monk himself was restricted from travelling, bound by indissoluble chains, yet this lone man, as if eager to enjoy a literary reputation, however spurious, was not scrupulous in practising certain dishonest devices. Before the discovery of printing, the concealment of a manuscript for the purpose of appropriation was an artifice, which, if we may decide by some rumors, more frequently occurred than has been detected. Plagiarism is the common sin of the monkish chronicler, to which he was often driven by repeating a mouldy tale a hundred times told; but his furtive pen extended to the capital crime of felony. I shall venture to give a pair of literary anecdotes of monkish writers.

Matthew of Paris, one of these chroniclers, is somewhat esteemed, and Matthew of Westminster is censured, for having copied in his "Flores Historiarum" the other Matthew; but we need not draw any invidious comparison between the two Matthews, since Matthew the first had himself transcribed the work of Roger, the Prior of Wendover. The famous "Polychronicon," which long served as a text-book for the encyclopedic knowledge of the fourteenth century, has two names attached to it, and one, however false, which can never be

separated from the work, interwoven in its texture. This famed volume is ascribed to Ranulph, or Ralph Higden of St. Werberg's Monastery, now the Cathedral of Chester. Ralph, that he might secure the tenure of this awful edifice of universal history for a thousand years, most subdolously contrived that the initial letter of every chapter, when put together, signified that Ralph, a monk of Chester, had compiled the work. Centuries did not contradict the assumption; but time, that blabber of more fatal secrets than those of authors, discovered in the same monastery that another brother Roger had labored for the world their universal history in his "Polycratica Temporum." On examination, the truth flashed; for, lo! the peccant pen of Ralph had silently transmigrated the "Polycratica" into the "Polychronicon," and had only laid a trap for posterity by his treacherous acrostics!*

These universal chroniclers usually opened, *ab initio*, with the Creation, dispersed at Babel, reach home, and paused at the Norman Conquest. This was their usual first division: it was a long journey, but a beaten path. Whatever they found written was history to them; for they were without means of correcting their aptitude for credence. Their anachronisms often ludicrously give the lie to their legendary statements.

Most of these monastic writers composed in a debased Latinity of their own, bald and barbarous, but which had

* We have a remarkable instance among the Italian historians of this period. Giovanni Villani wrote about 1330: Muratori discovered that Villani had wholly transcribed the ancient portion of his history from an old chronicle of Malespini, who wrote about 1230, without any acknowledgment whatever. Doubtless Villani imagined that an insulated manuscript, during a century's oblivion, had little chance of ever being classed among the most ancient records of Italian history. Malespini's "Chronicle," like its brothers, was stuffed with fables: Villani was honest enough not to add to them, though not sufficiently so not silently to appropriate the whole chronicle, — the only one Dante read. — *Tiraboschi*, v. 410, part 2d.

grown up with the age: their diction bears a rude sort of simplicity. Yet, though they were not artists, there were occasions when they were inevitably graphic, — when they detail like a witness in court. These writers have been lauded by the gratitude of antiquaries, and valued by philosophical historians. A living historian has observed of them, that "nothing can be more contemptible as compositions; nothing can be more satisfactory as authorities." But it is necessary that we should be reminded of the partial knowledge and the partial passions of these sources of our earlier modern history. Lift the cowl from the historiographers in their cells recording those busy events in which they never were busied, characterizing those eminent persons from whom they were far removed: William of Malmesbury, not one of the least estimable of these writers, confesses that he drew his knowledge from public rumors, or what the relaters of news brought to them.* In some respects, their history sinks to the level of one of our newspapers, and is as liable to be tinged with party feelings. The whole monastery had as limited notions of public affairs as they had of the kingdom itself, of which they knew but little out of their own county.

No monastic writer, as an historian, has descended to posterity for the eminence of his genius; for the same stamp of mind gave currency to their works. Woe to the sovereign who would have clipped their wings! then "tongues talked and pens wrote" monkish. There was a proverb among them, that "the giver is blessed; but he who taketh away is accursed." None but themselves could appeal to Heaven; and for their crowned slaves they were not penurious of their beatitude. They knew to crouch as well as to thunder. They usually clung to the reigning party; and a new party or a change of dynasty was sure to change their chronicling pen. HALL, the chronicler of Henry the Eighth, at the first mo-

* We have an elegant modern version of this monk's history by the Rev. J. Sharpe.

ment when it was allowable to speak distinctly concerning these monkish writers, observed, "These monastical persons, learned and unliterate, better fed than taught, took on them to write and register in the book of fame the arts and doings and politic governance of kings and princes." It seems not to have occurred to the chronicler of Henry the Eighth, that, had not those monks "taken on them to write and register," we should have had no "Book of Fame." It is a duty we owe to truth to penetrate into the mysteries of monkery; but the monks will always retain their right to receive their large claims on our admiration of their labors.

There was also another class of early chroniclers throughout Europe,—men who filled the office of a sort of royal historiographer; who accompanied the king and the army in their progress, to note down the occurrences they deemed most honorable or important to the nation. But incidents written down by a monk in his cell, or by a diarist pacing the round with majesty, would be equally warped by the views of the monastery in the one case, or by a flattering subservience to the higher power in the other.

In this manner, the early history of Europe was written; the more ancient part was stuffed with fables; and, when it might have become useful in recording passages and persons of the writer's own times, we have a one-sided tale, wherein, while half is suppressed, the other is disguised by flattery or by satire. Such causes are well known to have corrupted these first origins of modern history,—a history in which the commons and the people at large had very little concern, till the day arrived, in the progress of society, when chronicles were written by laymen in the vernacular idiom for their nation.

ARNOLDE'S CHRONICLE.

VERY early in the sixteenth century appeared a volume which seems to have perplexed our literary historians by its mutable and undefinable character. It is a book without a title, and miscalled by the deceptive one of "Arnolde's Chronicle, or the Customs of London:" but "the Customs" are not the manners of the people, but rather "the Customs" of the Custom-house; and it in no shape resembles, or pretends to be, "a chronicle." This erroneous title seems to have been injudiciously annexed to it by Hearne the antiquary, and should never have been retained. This anomalous work, of which there are three ancient editions, had the odd fate of all three being sent forth without a title and without a date; and our bibliographers cannot with any certainty ascertain the order or precedence of these editions. One edition was issued from the press of a Flemish printer at Antwerp, and possibly may be the earliest. The first printer, whether English or Flemish, was evidently at a loss to christen this monstrous miscellaneous babe; and ridiculously took up the title and subjects of the first articles which offered themselves, to designate more than a hundred of the most discrepant variety. The ancient editions appeared as "the names of the Baylyfs, Custos, Mayres, and Sherefs of the Cyte of London, with the Chartour and Lybartyes of the same Cyte, &c., &c.; with other dyvers matters good and necessary for every Cytezen to understand and know,"—a humble title equally fallacious with the higher one of a "Chronicle;" for it has described many objects of considerable curiosity, more interesting than

"mayors and sheriffs," and even "the charter and liberties" of "the cyte."

In conveying a notion of a jumble,* though the things themselves are sufficiently grave, we cannot avoid a ludicrous association; yet this should not lessen the value of its information.

A considerable portion of this medley wholly relates to the municipal interests of the citizens of London, — charters and grants, with a vast variety of forms or models of public and private instruments, chiefly of a commercial description. Parish ordinances mix with acts of Parliament; and, when we have conned the oath of the beadle of the ward, we are startled by Pope Nicholas's Bull. We have the craft of grafting trees and altering of fruits, as well in color as in taste, close to an oration of the messenger of "the Soudan of Babylon" to the pope in 1488. Indeed, we have many more useful crafts besides the altering of the flavor of fruits, and the oration of the Mahometan to the representative of St. Peter; for here are culinary receipts to keep sturgeon, to make vinegar "shortly," "percely to grow in an hour's space," and to make ypocras, straining the wine through a bag of spices, — it was nothing more than our mulled wine; and further are receipts to make ink and compound gunpowder, to make soap and to brew beer. Whether we may derive any fresh hints from our ancestor of the year 1500, exceeds my judgment: but to this eager transcriber posterity owes one of the most passionate poems in our language; for betwixt "the composition between the merchants of England and the town of Antwerp," and "the reckoning to buy wares in Flanders," first broke into light "A Ballade of the Notbrowne Mayde." Thus, when an indiscriminating collector is at work, one cannot foresee what good fortune may not chance to be his lot.

* In Oldys's "British Librarian," there is an accurate analysis of the work, in which every single article is enumerated.

Warton has truly characterized this work as "the most heterogeneous and multifarious miscellany that ever existed;" but he seems to me to have mistaken both the design of the collector and the nature of the collection. Some supposed that the collector, Richard Arnolde, intended the volume to be an antiquarian repertory; but, as the materials were recent, that idea cannot be admitted: and Warton censures the compiler, who, to make up a volume, printed together whatever he could amass of notices and papers of every sort and subject. The modern editor of "Arnolde's Chronicle" was perplexed at the contents of what he calls "a strange book."

The critical decision of Warton is much too searching for a volume in which the compiler never wrote a single line, and probably never entertained the remotest idea of the printer's press. This book without a name, is, in fact, nothing more than a simple collection, made by an English merchant engaged in the Flemish trade. Nor was such a work peculiar to this artless collector; for, in a time of rare publications, such men seemed to have formed for themselves a sort of library, of matters they deemed worthy of recollection, to which they could have easy recourse.* By the internal evidence, Arnolde was no stranger at Antwerp nor at Dordrecht. Antwerp was then a favorite residence of the English merchants; there the typographic art flourished, and the printers often printed English books: and as this collection was printed at Antwerp by Doesborowe, a Flemish printer, we might incline, with Douce, to infer that the Flemish was the first edition; for it seems not probable that a foreign printer would have selected an English volume, of little interest to foreigners, to reprint; although we can imagine, that from personal consideration, or by the accident of obtaining the manuscript, he might have been induced to be the first publisher. Whoever was the first printer, the collector

* A similar volume to Arnolde's may be found in the "Harl. MSS.," No. 2,252.

himself seems to have been little concerned in the publication, by the suppression of his name, by the omission of a title, by not prefixing a preface, nor arranging in any way this curious medley of useful things, which he would familiarly turn to as his occasions needed; and — if we may compare a grave volume with the lightest — was of that class which ladies call their "scrap-books," and assuredly not, according to its fallacious title, a CHRONICLE.

THE FIRST PRINTED CHRONICLE.

THE first chronicle in our vernacular prose, designed for the English people, was the earnest labor of one of themselves, a citizen and alderman, and sometime sheriff of London, — ROBERT FABYAN. Here, for the first time, the spectacle of English affairs, accompanied by what he has called "A Concordance of Stories," which included separate notices of French history contemporaneous with the periods he records, was opened for "the unlettered who understand no Laten." Our chronicler, in the accustomed mode, fixes the periods of history by dates from Adam or from Brute. He opens with a superfluous abridgment of Geoffry of Monmouth: the "Polychronicon" is one of his favorite sources; but his authorities are multifarious. His French history is a small stream from "La Mere des Chroniques," and other chronicles of his contemporary Gaguin, a royal historiographer who wandered in the same taste, but who, Fabyan had the sagacity to discover, carefully darkened all matters unpleasant to Frenchmen, but never "leaving any thing out of his book that may sound to the advancement of the French nacyon."

It was a rare occurrence in a layman, and moreover a merchant, to have cultivated the French and the Latin languages. Fabyan was not a learned man; for the age of men of learning had not yet arrived, though it was soon to come. At that early day of our typography, when our native annalists lay scattered in their manuscript seclusion, it was no ordinary delving which struck into the dispersed veins of the dim and dark mine of our history. So little in that day was

the critical knowledge of our writers, that Fabyan has "quoted the same work under different appellations:" and some of our historical writers he seems not to have met with in his researches; for the chronicles of Robert of Gloucester and of Peter Langtoft, though but verse, would have contributed some freshness to his own. In seven unequal divisions, the chronicle closes with the days of the seventh Henry. These seven divisions were probably more fantastical than critical: the number was adopted to cheer the good man with "the seven joys of the Virgin," which he sings forth in unmetrical metre, evidently participating in the rapturous termination of each of his own "seven joys."

Our grave chronicler, arrayed in his civic dignities, seems to have provoked the sensitiveness of the poetical critic in Warton, and the caustic wit in Horace Walpole. "No sheriff," exclaims Walpole, "was ever less qualified to write a history of England. He mentions the deaths of princes, and revolutions of government, with the same phlegm and brevity as he would speak of the appointment of churchwardens."

We may suspect that our citizen and chronicler, however he might be familiar with the public acts of royalty, had no precise notions of the principles of their government. We cannot otherwise deem of an historical recorder, whose political sagacity, in that famous interview between our Edward the Fourth and Louis the Eleventh, of which Comines has left us a lively scene, could not penetrate further than to the fashion of the French monarch's dress. He tells us, of "the nice and wanton disguised apparel that the King Louys wore upon him at the time of this meeting, *I might make a long rehearsal*, apparalled more like a minstrel than a prince." Fabyan shared, too, in the hearty "John Bullism" of that day, in a mortal jealousy of the Gaul, and even of his *Sainte Ampoule*. Though no man had a greater capacity of faith for miracles and saints on English ground, yet for those of his neighbors he had found authority that it was not necessary

for his salvation to believe them; and has ventured to decide on one, that "they must be folys (fools) who believe it." Had the *Sainte Ampoule*, however, been deposited in Westminster Abbey for our own coronations, instead of the Cathedral at Rheims for a French king, Fabyan had not doubted of the efficacy of every drop of the holy oil.

But the dotage of FABYAN did not particularly attach to him; and, though his intellectual comprehension was restricted to the experience of an alderman, he might have been the little Machiavel of his wardmote; for he has thrown out a shrewd observation which no doubt we owe to his own sagacity. In noticing the neglect of a mayor in repairing the walls which had been begun by his predecessor, he observes, that this generally happens: for "one mayor will not finish that thing which another beginneth; for then they think, be the deed ever so good and profitable, that the honor thereof shall be ascribed to the beginner, and not to the finisher; which lack of charity and desire of vainglory causeth many good acts and deeds to die, and grow out of mind, to the great decay of the commonwealth of the city." A profound observation, which might be extended to monarchs as well as mayors.

Indulging too often the civic curiosity of "a citizen and alderman," FABYAN has been taunted for troubling posterity. "FABYAN," says Warton, "is equally attentive to the succession of the mayors of London and the monarchs of England. He seems to have thought the dinners at Guildhall and the pageantries of the city companies more interesting transactions than our victories in France and our struggles for public liberty at home."

This seems to be a random stricture. The alderman, indeed, has carefully registered the mayors and the sheriffs of London; and the scientific in "high and low prices" perhaps may be grateful that our pristine chronicler has also furnished the prices of wheat, oxen, sheep, and poultry: but we cannot find that he has commemorated the diversified

forms these took on the solemn tables of the Guildhall; nor can we meet with the pasteboard pomps of city pageants, one only being recorded, on the return of Henry the Sixth from France.

Our modern critic, composing in the spirit of our day, alludes to "the struggle for public liberty;" but "public liberty" must have been a very ambiguous point with the honest citizen, who had been a sad witness to the contests of two murderous families, who had long sought their mutual destruction, and long convulsed the whole land. We may account for the tempered indifference, and "the brief recitals" for which this simple citizen is reproached, who had lived through such changeful and ensanguined scenes, which had left their bleeding memories among the families of his contemporaries.

The faculties of Fabyan were more level with their objects when he had to chronicle the "tempestuous weathering of thunder and lightning," with the ominous fall of a steeple, or "the image of our Lady" dashed down from its roof; or when he describes the two castles in the air, whence issued two armies, black and white, combating in the skies till the white vanished! Such portents lasted much later than the days of Fabyan; for honest Stowe records what had once ushered in St. James's night, when, the lightning and thunder coming in at the south window and bursting on the north, the bells of St. Michael were listened to with horror, ringing of themselves, while ugly shapes were dancing on the steeple. Their natural philosophy and their piety were long stationary: yet even then some were critical in their remarks; for, when Fabyan recorded "flying dragons and fiery spirits in the air," this was corrected by omitting "the fiery spirits," but agreeing to "the flying dragons." Fabyan, however, has preserved more picturesque and ingenious visions in some legends of saints or apparitions, — still delightsome. These legends formed their "Works of Fiction," and were more affecting

than ours; for they were supernatural, and no one doubted their verity.

Our pristine chronicler, as we have seen, has received hard measure from the two eminent critics of the eighteenth century, who have censured as a history that which is none. Chronicles were written when the science of true history had yet no existence: a chronicle then, in reality, is but a part of history. Every fact dispersed in its insulated state refuses all combination; cause and effect lie remote and obscured from each other: disguised by their ostensible pretexts, the true motives of actions in the great actors of the drama of history cannot be found in the chronological chronicler. The real value of his diligence consists in copiousness and discrimination; qualities rather adverse to each other. FABYAN betrays the infirmities of the early chronicler, not yet practised even in the art of simple detail, without distinction of the importance or the insignificance of the matters he records: his eager pen reckoned the number, without knowing to test the weight; to him all facts appeared of equal worth, for all alike had cost him the same toil; and thus he yields an abundance without copiousness. In raising the curiosity which he has not satisfied for us, his mighty tome shrinks into a narrow scope, and his imperfect narratives, brief and dry, offer only the skeletons of history. The mere antiquarian, indeed, prefers the chronicle to the history: the acquisition of a fact with him is the limit of his knowledge; and he is apt to dream that he possesses the superstructure, when he is only at work on the foundations.

The Chronicle of FABYAN attracts our notice for a remarkable incident attending its publication. The Chronicle was finished in 1504, and remained in manuscript during the author's life, who died in 1512. The first edition did not appear till 1516. The cause which delayed the printing of an important work (for such it was in that day) has not been disclosed; yet perhaps we might have been interested to

have learned whether this protracted publication arose out of neglect difficult to comprehend, or from the printer, reluctant to risk the cost, or from any impediment from a higher quarter.

Be this as it may, we possess the writer's genuine work; for the printer, Pynson, was faithful to his author. The rarity of this first edition, Bale, on a loose rumor which no other literary historian has sanctioned, ascribes to its suppression by Cardinal Wolsey, who is represented in his fury to have condemned the volume to a public ignition, which no one appears to have witnessed, for its "dangerous exposition of the revenues of the clergy," which is not found in the volume. FABYAN truly was *ter Catholicus:* he was of the old religion, dying in the odor of sanctity, and was spared the trial of the new. The alderman's voluminous will is now, for us at least, as curious as any thing in his chronicle.* We here behold the play of the whole machinery of superstition, when men imagined that they secured the repose of their souls by feeing priests, and bribing saints by countless masses. This funereal rite was then called "the month's mind," and which, at least for that short period, prolonged the memory of the departed. For this lugubrious performance were provided ponderous torches for the bearers, tapers for shrines, and huge candlesticks, to be kept lighted at the altar. Three trenthalls (that is, thirty masses thrice told) were to be chorused by the Gray Friars; six priests were to perform the high mass, chant the requiem, and recite the *De Profundis* and the *Dirige;* and for nine years, on his mortuary day, he charges his "tenement in Cornhill" to pay for an *Obite!* But not only friars and priests were to pray or to sing for the repose of the soul of Alderman Fabyan: all comers were invited to kneel around the tomb; and, at times, children

* We are indebted to the zealous research of Sir Henry Ellis for the disinterment of this document, as well as for the collations which appear in his edition.

were to be called in, who if they could not read a *De Profundis* from the Psalter, the innocents were to cry forth a *Pater-Noster* or an *Ave!* There was a purveyance of ribs of beef and mutton, and ale, "stockfish, if Lent," and other recommendations, for "the comers to the *Dirige* at night." The alderman, however, seems to have planned a kind of economy in his "month's mind:" for not only was the repose of his soul in question, but also "the souls of all above written;" and these were a bead-roll of all the branches of Fabyan's family.

The Chronicle of FABYAN was not long given to the world, when it encountered the doom of a system at its termination, just before the beginnings of a coming one; that fatal period of a change in human affairs and human opinions, usually described as a state of transition. But, in this particular instance, the change occurred preceded by no transitional approach; for, within the small circuit of thirty years, it seemed as if the events of whole centuries had been more miraculously compressed than any in those "lives of the saints," whose legendary lore, provided the saints were English, Master FABYAN had loved to perpend. It was Henry the Eighth who turned all the sense of our chronicler into nonsense, all his honest faith into lying absurdities, all his exhortations to maintain "religious houses" into treasonable matters.

Successive editors of the editions of 1533, '43, and '55, surpassed each other in watchfulness, to rid themselves of the old song. Never was author so mutilated in parts, nor so wholly changed from himself; and when, as it sometimes happened, neither purgation nor castration availed the reforming critics, the author's sides bore their marginal flagellations. The corrections or alterations were, however, dexterously performed; for the texture of the work betrayed no trace of the rents. The omission of a phrase saved a whole sentence, and the change of an adjective or two set right a

whole character. It is true, they swept away all his delightful legends, without sparing his woful metres of "the seven joys of the Blessed Virgin" and his appreciation of some favorite relics. They disbanded all the saints, or treated them as they did "the holy virgin Edith," of whom FABYAN has recorded that "many *virtues* be rehearsed," which they delicately reduced to *verses*. His Holiness the Pope is simply "the Bishop of Rome;" and on one memorable occasion — the Papal interdiction of John — this "bishop" is designated in the margin, by the reformer, as "that monstrous and wicked beast." The narrative of Becket cost our compurgators, as it has many others, much shifting, and more omissions. In the tale of the hardy and ambitious archbishop, murdered by knightly assassins, Fabyan said, "They *martyred* the blessed archbishop:" our corrector of the press simply reads, "They slew the traitorous bishop." The *omissions* and the commissions in the Chronicle of FABYAN are often amusing, and always instructive; but these could not have been detected but by a severe collation, which has been happily performed. When the antiquary Brand discovered that FABYAN had been "*modernized*" in later editions, his observation would seem to have extended no further than to the style; but the style of FABYAN is simple and clear, even to modern readers. Modernized truly it was; not, however, for phrases, but for notions; not for statements, but for omissions; not for words, but for things.

HENRY THE EIGHTH: HIS LITERARY CHARACTER.

PEACE and policy had diffused a halcyon calmness over the land, and the people now discerned the approach of another era. Henry the Eighth, who appears with such opposite countenances in the great gallery of history, gave the country more glorious promises of an accomplished sovereign than England had yet witnessed; and, however he may appear differently before the calm eye of posterity, the passions of his own times secured his popularity even to his latter days. Youthful, with all its vigorous and generous temper, and not inferior in the majesty of his intellect any more than in that of his person; learned in his closet, yet enterprising in action, — this sovereign impressed his own commanding character on the nation. Such a monarch gave wings to their genius. Long pent up in their unhappy island, they soon indulged in a visionary dominion in France, and in rapid victories in Scotland; insular England once more aspired to be admitted into the great European family of States; and Henry was the arbiter of Francis of France and of Charles of Germany. The awakened spirit of the English people unconsciously was preparatory to the day which yet no one dreamed of. The minds of men were opening to wider views; and he who sate on the throne was one who would not be the last man in the kingdom to be mindless of its progress.

This lettered monarch himself professed authorship, and a sceptre was his pen. When he sent forth a volume which all

Europe was to read, and was graced by a new title which all Europe was to own, who dared to controvert the crowned controversialist, or impugn the validity of that airy title? His majesty alone was allowed to confute himself.* Trained from his early days in scholastic divinity (for he was designed to be an archbishop), the volume, however aided by others, was the native growth of his own mind. The king's taste for this learning was studiously flattered by the great cardinal, who gently recommended to his restless master a perusal of the nineteen folios of Thomas Aquinas, possibly with the hope of fixing the royal fly in the repose of the cobwebs of the schoolmen. Such, indeed, were his habits of study, that he could interest himself in compiling a national Latin grammar, when the schools succeeded to the dissolved monasteries. The grammar was issued as an act of Parliament; no other but the royal grammar was to be thumbed, without incurring the peril of a premunire.†

It is to be regretted that we are supplied with but few literary anecdotes of this literary monarch. Some we may incidentally glean, and some may be deduced from inference. The age was not yet far enough advanced in civilization to enjoy that inquisitive leisure which leaves its memorials for a distant posterity in the court tattle of a Suetonius or the secret history of a Procopius. It has, however, been recorded, that certain acts of Parliament, and proclamations, were corrected by the royal pen, and particularly the first draught of the act which empowered the king to erect bishoprics was written by his own hand; and he was the active editor of

* The manuscript of Henry the Eighth reposes in the Vatican, witnessed by his own hand in this inscription: "Anglorum Rex, Henricus Leoni X. 'mittit hoc opus et fidei testem et amicitiæ.'" — I found this inscription in one of the notes of Selden to the "Polyolbion" of Drayton.

† The famous Grammar of Lilly was the work of a learned association, in which it appears that both the king and the cardinal had the honor to co-operate. Sir Thomas Elyot has designated Henry "as the chief author." — *Preface to the Castle of Health.*

those monarchical pamphlets, as they may be classed, on religious topics, which were frequently required during his reign.

This learned monarch was unquestionably the first patron of our vernacular literature: he indulged in a literary intercourse with our earliest writers, and evinced a keen curiosity on any novelty in the infant productions of the English press. On frequent occasions, he took a personal interest in the success, and even in the concoction, of literary productions. He fully entered into the noble designs of Sir Thomas Elyot to create a vernacular style, and critically discussed with him the propriety of the use of new words "apt for the purpose;" and on one occasion, when Sir Thomas Elyot projected our first Latin dictionary, the king, in the presence of the courtiers, commended the design, and offered the author not only his royal counsel, but a supply of such books as the royal library possessed.

The king was not offended, as were some of the courtiers, with the freedom displayed by Elyot in some of his ethical works. Elyot tells us, "His grace not only took it in the better part, but with princely words, full of majesty, commended my diligence, simplicity, and courage, in that I spared no estate in the rebuking of vice." The king, at the same time that he protected Elyot from his petty critics, rewarded the early efforts of another vernacular author, who had dedicated to him his first work in English prose, by a pension, which enabled the young student, Roger Ascham, to set off on his travels. A remarkable instance of Henry's quick attention to the novelties of our literature appears by his critical conversation with the antiquary, Thynne, who had presented to him his new edition of Chaucer. His majesty soon discovered the novelty of "the Pilgrim's Tale," a bitter satire on the pride and state of the clergy, which at the time was ascribed to Chaucer. The king, pointing it out to the learned editor, observed in these very words: "William

Thynne! I doubt this will not be allowed; for I suspect the bishops will call thee in question for it." The editor submitted, "If your grace be not offended, I hope to be protected by you." The king "bade him go, and fear not!" It is evident that his majesty was "not offended" at a severe satire on the clergy. But even Henry the Eighth could not always change at will his political position: the minister in power may find means to counteract even the absolute king. A great stir was made in Wolsey's parliament; it was even proposed that the works of Chaucer should be wholly suppressed: some good-humored sprite rose in favor of the only poet in the nation, observing that all the world knew that Dan Chaucer had never written any thing more than fables! The authority of Wolsey so far prevailed, that "the Pilgrim's Tale" was suppressed; and it seems that the haughty prelate would willingly have suppressed the editor in his own person. THYNNE was an intimate acquaintance of SKELTON, whose caustic rhymes of "Colin Clout" had been concocted at his country-house. THYNNE, in this perilous adventure of publishing "the Pilgrim's Tale," was saved from the talons of the cardinal; for this monarch's royal word was at all times sacred with him.

A literary anecdote of this monarch has been recently disclosed, which at least attests his ardor for information. When Henry wanted time, if not patience, to read a new work, he put copies into the hands of two opposite characters; and, from the reports of these rival reviewers, the king ventured to deduce his own results. This method of judging a work without meditating on it was a new royal cut in the road of literature, to which we of late have been accustomed; but it seemed with Henry rather to have increased the vacillations of his opinions than steadied the firmness of his decisions.

The court of Henry displayed a brilliant circle of literary noblemen, distinguished for their translations, and some by

their songs and sonnets. Parker, Lord Morley, was a favorite for his numerous versions, some of which he dedicated to the king; the witty Wyat, who always sustained the anagram of his name, was a familiar companion; nor could Henry be insensible to the elegant effusions of Surrey, unless his political feelings indisposed his admiration. It was at the king's command that Lord Berners translated the "Chronicles of Froissart," and the volume is adorned by the royal arms. Sternhold, the memorable psalm-inditer, was a groom of the chamber, and a personal favorite with his master; and Henry appointed the illustrious Leland to search for and to preserve the antiquities of England, and invested him with the honorable title of "the King's Antiquary."

Scholars, too, stood around the royal table; and the company at the palace excelled that of any academy, as Erasmus has told us. Learning, patronized by a despot, became a fashionable accomplishment; and the model for the court was in the royal family themselves. It is from this period that we may date that race of learned ladies which continued through the long reign of our maiden queen. Yet, before the accession of Henry the Eighth, half a century had not elapsed, when female literature was at so low an ebb, that Sir Thomas More noticed, as an extraordinary circumstance, that Jane Shore could read and write. When Erasmus visited the English court, he curiously observed that "the course of human affairs was changed: the monks, famed in time past for learning, are become ignorant, and WOMEN LOVE BOOKS." Erasmus had witnessed at the court of Henry the Eighth the Princess Mary and Elizabeth, both of whom held an epistolary correspondence in Latin; the daughter of Sir Anthony Cook, and Lady Jane Grey, versed in Greek; and the Queen Catherine Parr, his fervent admirer for his paraphrase on the four Gospels. Erasmus had frequented the house of the Mores, which he describes as a perfect *musarum domicilium*. The venerable Nicholas Udall, a contemporary, has also left

us a picture of that day: "It is now a common thing to see young virgins so nouzeld (nursed) and trained in the study of letters, that they willingly set all other vain pastimes at nought; reading and writing, and with most earnest study, both early and late." The pliable nobility of Henry the Eighth easily took the bend of the royal family; and among their daughters, doubtless, there were more learned women than are chronicled in Ballard's "Memoirs." Lady Jane Grey, meditating on Plato, was not so uncommon an incident as it appears to us in the insulated anecdote. The learning of that day must not be held as the pedantry of a later; for it was laying the foundations of every knowledge in the soil of England.

The king's more elegant tastes diffused themselves among the finer arts at a time when they were yet strangers in this land. His father's travelled taste had received a tincture of these arts when abroad: in Henry the Eighth they burst into existence with a more robust aptitude. He eagerly invited foreign artists to his court: but the patronage of an English monarch was not yet appreciated by some of the finest geniuses of Italy; we lay yet too far out of their observation and sympathies; and it is recorded of one of the Italian artists, a fiery spirit who had visited England, that he designated us as *quelle bestie Inglesi*. Raphael and Titian could not be lured from their studios and their blue skies; but fortunately a Northern genius, whose name is as immortal as their own, was domiciliated by the liberal monarch, the friend of Erasmus and of More, — Hans Holbein.

Among the musicians of Henry, we find French, Italians, and Germans: he was himself a musician, and composed several pieces which I believe are still retained in the service of the Royal Chapel.* He had a taste for the gorgeous or grotesque amusements of the Continent, combining them with

* Sir John Hawkins's "History of Music," vol. ii.

a display of the fine arts in their scenical effects. One memorable night of the Epiphany, the court was startled by a new glory, where the king and his companions appeared in a scene which the courtiers had never before witnessed. "It was a mask after the manner of Italy, a thing not seen afore in England," saith the chronicler of Henry's court-days. Once, to amaze a foreign embassy, and on a sudden to raise up a banqueting-house, the monarch set to work the right magicians: an architect and a poet, and his master of the revels, were months inventing and laboring. The regal banqueting-house was adorned by the arts of picture and music, of sculpture and architecture; all was full of illusion and reality: the house itself was a pageant to exhibit a pageant. The magnificent prince was himself so pleased, that he anxiously stopped his visitors at the points of sight most favorable to catch the illusion of the perspective. A monarch of such fine tastes and gorgeous fancies would create the artists who are the true inventors.

BOOKS OF THE PEOPLE.

THE people of Europe, who had no other knowledge of languages than their own uncultivated dialects, seem to have possessed what, if we may so dignify it, we would call a fugitive literature of their own. It is obvious that the people could not be ignorant of the important transactions in their own land: transactions in which their fathers had been the spectators or the actors, the sons would perpetuate by their traditions; the names of their heroes had not died with them on the battle-field. Nor would the villain's subjection to the feudal lord spoil the merriment of the land, nor dull the quip of natural facetiousness.

Before the people had national books, they had national songs. Even at a period so obscure as the days of Charlemagne, there were "*most ancient songs*, in which the acts and wars of the old kings were sung." These songs, which, the secretary of Charlemagne has informed us, were sedulously collected by the command of that great monarch, are described by the secretary, according to his classical taste, as *barbara et antiquissima carmina;* "barbarous," because they were composed in the rude vernacular language: yet such was their lasting enegy, that they were, even in the eighth century, held to be "most ancient," so long had they dwelt in the minds of the people! The enlightened emperor had more largely comprehended their results in the vernacular idiom, on the genius of the nation, than had the more learned and diplomatic secretary. It was an ingenious conjecture, that possibly even these ancient songs may in some shape have come down

to us in the elder Northern and Teutonic romances, and the Danish, the Swedish, the Scottish, and the English popular ballads. The kindling narrative, and the fiery exploits which entranced the imagination of Charlemagne, mutilated or disguised, may have framed the incidents of a romance, or been gathered up in the snatches of old wives' tales, and finally may have even lingered in the nursery.

Our miserable populace had poets for themselves, whose looser carols were the joy of the streets or the fields. Unfortunately, we only learn that they had such artless effusions; for these songs have perished on the lips of the singers. The monks were too dull or too cunning to chronicle the outpourings of a people whom they despised, and which assuredly would have often girded them to the quick. A humorous satire of this kind has stolen down to us, in that exquisite piece of drollery and grotesque invention, "the Land of Cokaigne."* They had historical ballads which were rehearsed to all listeners; and it was from these "old ballads, popular through succeeding times," that William of Malmesbury tells us that "he learned more than from books written expressly for the information of posterity," though he will not answer for their precise truth. They had also political ballads. A memorable one, free as a lampoon, made by one of the adherents of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in the fugitive day of his victory in 1264, occasioned a statute against "slanderous reports or tales to cause discord betwixt king and people," — a spirit which by no means was put down by that enactment.† This was a ballad sung to the people, as appears by the opening line, —

"Sitteth all stille, and harkeneth to me!"

* Mr. Ellis has preserved it entire, with notes which make it intelligible to any modern reader.

† Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry," ii. 1. "The liberty of abusing their kings and princes at pleasure, assumed by the good people of this realm, is a privilege of very long standing."

This ballad strikingly contrasts with another of unnerving dejection, after the irreparable defeat of the party, and the death of the Earl of Leicester, which, it is remarkable, is written in French; having been probably addressed solely to that discomfited nobility, who would sympathize with the lament.*

The people, or the inferior classes of society, who despised the courtly French then in vogue, formed such a multitude, that it was for them that ROBERT of GLOUCESTER wrote his Chronicle, and that ROBERT of BRUNNE translated the Chronicle of Peter Langtoft and a volume of recreative tales from the French. The people even then were eager readers, or, more properly, auditors; and this further appears in the *naïveté* of our rhymer's prologue to this chronicle. The monk tells us, that this story of England, which he now shows in English, is not intended for the learned, but the illiterate; not for the clerk, but the layman;

"Not for the lerid, but the lewed:" †

and he describes the class, "they who take solace and mirth when they sit together in fellowship," and deem it "wisdom for to witten" (to know) —

"The state of the land, and haf it written."

The Hermit of Hampole expressly wrote his theological poems for the people, for those who could understand only English.

At a period when we glean nothing from any literature of the people, we find that it had a positive existence; for two

* The Political Songs of England have been recently given by Mr. Thomas Wright, to whom our literature owes many deep obligations. [In the series of volumes published by the Camden Society.]

† *Lewed* Mr. Campbell interprets *low*, which is not quite correct. Hearne explains the term as signifying "the laity, layman, and the illiterate." The *layman* was always considered to be *illiterate* by the devices of the monks.

chronicles and a collection of tales and theological poems were furnished for them in their native idiom by writers who unquestionably sought for celebrity. The people, too, had what in every age has been their peculiar property, — all the fragmentary wisdom of antiquity, in those "Few Words to the Wise," so daily useful, or so apt in the contingencies of human life; proverbs and Æsopian fables, delightedly transmitted from father to son. The memories of the people were stored with short narratives; for a startling tale was not easily forgotten. They had songs of trades, appropriated to the different avocations of laborers. These were a solace to the solitary task-worker, or threw a cheering impulse when many were employed together. Such HALL aptly describes as —

"Sung to the wheel, and sung unto the payle." *

These songs are found among the people of every country; and these effusions were the true poetry of the heart, which kept alive their social feelings. The people had even the greater works brought down for them to a diminutive size: the lays of minstrelsy were usually fragments of the metrical chronicles, or a disjointed tale from some romance; † such as the popular Fabliaux, which form the amusing collection of Le Grand.

These proverbs and these fables, these songs and these tales, — all these were a library without books, till the day arrived when the people had books of their own, open to their comprehension, and responding to their sympathies. That

* It is to be regretted that Mr. JAMIESON, in his "Popular Ballads," was unavoidably prevented enlarging this class of his songs. He has given the carols of the *Boatmen*, the *Corn-grinders*, and the *Dairy-women*. — JAMIESON'S *Popular Ballads*, ii. 852. [See also "Curiosities of Literature," vol. ii. p. 315, for an article on Songs of Trades, or Songs of the People. A volume of "Songs of the English Peasantry" was published by the Percy Society; and several others are given, with the tunes, in Chappell's "Popular Music of the Olden Time."]

† Hearne's "Preface to Peter Langtoft's Chronicle," xxxvii.

this traditional literature was handed down from generation to generation, appears from the circumstance, that hardly had the printing-press been in use, when a multitude of "the people's books" spread through Europe their rude instruction or their national humor. They were even rendered more attractive by the expressive woodcuts, which palpably appealed to a sense which required no "cunning" to comprehend. Their piety and their terror were long excited by that variety of Satan and his devils, which were exhibited to their appalled imaginations, — the mouth of hell gaping wide, and the crowd of the damned driven in by the flaming pitchforks. "The Calendar of Shepherds," originally a translation from the French, was a popular handbook, and rich were its contents, — a perpetual almanac, the saints' days, with the signs of the zodiac, a receptacle of domestic receipts, all the wisdom of proverbs, and all the mysteries of astrology, divinity, politics, and geography, mingled in verse and prose. It was the encyclopædia for the poor man, and even for some of his betters.

The courtly favorites of a former age descended from the oriel window to the cottage-lattice: perpetuated in our "chapbooks," sold on the stalls of fairs, and mixed with the wares of "the chapman," they became the books of the people. "The Gestes" of Guy of Warwick and Sir Bevis of Hampton, and other fabulous heroes of chivalry, have been recognized in their humble disguise of the "Tom Thumb," and "Tom Hickathrift," and "Jack the Giant-killer," of the people.

In France, their *bibliothèque bleue* — books now in the shape of pamphlets, deriving their name from the color of their wrappers — preserves the remains of the fugitive literature of the people; and in Italy, to this day, several of the old romances of chivalry are cut down to a single paul's purchase, and delight the humble buyers.* Guerin Meschino, of native

* The curious researches of a French antiquary in this class of literature are given in the two octavo volumes entitled "Histoire des Livres Popu-

origin, still retains his popularity. In Germany, some patriotic antiquaries have delighted to collect this household literature of the illiterate. The Germans, who, more than any other nation, seem to have cherished the hallowed feelings of the homestead, have a term to designate this class of literature: they call these volumes *Volksbücher*, or "the people's books."

There existed a more intimate intercourse between the vernacular writers of Germany and our own than appears yet to have been investigated. "The Merry Jests of Howleglas," most delectable to the people from their grossness and their humor, is of German origin; and it has been recently discovered, that "the History of Friar Rush," which perplexed the researches of Ritson, is a literal prose version of a German poem, printed in 1587.* "Reynard the Fox," a most amusing Æsopian history; an exquisite satire on the vices of the clergy, the devices of courtiers, and not sparing majesty itself; an intelligible manual of profound Machiavelism, displaying the trickery of circumventing and supplanting, and parrying off opponents by sleights of wit, — was translated by Caxton from the Dutch.†

This political fiction has been traced in several languages to an earlier period than the thirteenth century. The learned Germans hold it to be a complete picture of the feudal manners; and Heineccius, one of the most able jurists, declares that it has often assisted him in clearing up the jurisprudence of Germany; and that, for the genius of the writer, the volume deserves to be ranked with the classics of antiquity. The writer probably had good reasons for concealing his name; but his intimacy with a court-life is apparent. He has

laires, ou de la Littérature du Colportage" (Paris, 1854), by M. Charles Nisard, who was appointed to the task by a royal commission. — Ed.

* "Foreign Quarterly Review," vol. xviii. [It is reprinted in the first volume of Thoms's "Early English Prose Romances."]

† It has been frequently reprinted, and recently in Germany, as a *livre de luxe*, illustrated with admirable designs by Kaulbach. — Ed.

dexterously described the wiles of Reynard, whose cunning overreached his opponents; his wit, his learning, his humor, and knowledge of mankind, are of no ordinary degree; and this favorite satire contributed, no less than the works of Erasmus, of Rabelais, and of Boccaccio, to pave the way for the Reformation. It was among the earliest productions of the press in Germany and in England, and became so popular here, that on the old altar-piece of Canterbury Cathedral are several paintings taken from this pungent satire. The modern Italian poet, CASTI, seems to have borrowed the plan of his famous political satire, "Gl' Animali Parlanti," from "Reynard the Fox."

The Germans have occasionally borrowed from us, as we also from the Italian jest-books, many of our "tales and quick answers:" the *facetiæ* of Poggius and Domenichi and others have been a fertile source of our own.

All tales have wings, whether they come from the East or the North; and they soon become denizens wherever they alight. Thus it has happened, that the tale which charmed the wandering Arab in his tent, or cheered the Northern peasant by his winter-fire, alike held on its journey toward England and Scotland. Dr. Leyden was surprised, when he first perused the fabliaux of "the Poor Scholar," "the Three Thieves," and "the Sexton of Cluni," to recognize the popular stories which he had often heard in infancy. He was then young in the poetical studies of the antiquary, or he would not have been at a loss to know whether the Scots drew their tales from the French, or the French from their Scottish intercourse; or whether they originated with the Celtic or the Scandinavian, or sometimes even with the Orientalists.

The genealogy of many a tale, as well as the humors of native jesters, from the days of Henry the Eighth to those of Joe Miller (who, as somebody has observed, now, too, begins to be ancient), may be traced, not only to France, to Spain,

and to Italy, but to Greece and Rome, and at length to Persia and to India. Our most familiar stories have afforded instances. The tale of "Whittington and his Cat," supposed to be indigenous to our country, was first narrated by Arlotto, in his "Novella delle Gatte," in his "Facetie," which were printed soon after his death, in 1483: the tale is told of a merchant of Genoa. We must, however, recollect that Arlotto had been a visitor at the court of England. The other puss, though without her boots, may be seen in Straparola's "Piacevoli Notti." The familiar little hunchback of the "Arabian Nights" has been a universal favorite: it may be found everywhere, — in "the Seven Wise Masters," in the "Gesta Romanorum," and in Le Grand's "Fabliaux." The popular tale of Llywellyn's greyhound, whose grave we still visit at Bethgelert, Sir William Jones discovered in Persian tradition; and it has given rise to a proverb, "As repentant as the man who killed his greyhound." In "Les Maximes des Orientaux" of Galland, we find several of our popular tales.

"Bluebeard," "Red-riding Hood," and "Cinderella" are tales told alike in the nurseries of England and France, Germany and Denmark; and the domestic warning to the Lady-bird, the chant of our earliest day, is sung by the nurse of Germany.* All nations seem alike concerned in this copartnership of tale-telling; borrowing, adulterating, clipping, and even receiving back the identical coin which had circulated wherever it was found. Douce, one of whose favorite pursuits was tracing the origin and ramification of tales, to my knowledge could have afforded a large volume of this genealogy of romance; but that volume probably reposes for the regale of the next century, that literary antiquary being deterred by caustic reviewers from the publication of his useful researches.

* Weber. "Brit. Bib.," vol. iv. — The German song of the Lady-bird is beautifully versified in the preface to "German Popular Stories," by the late Edgar Taylor.

The people, however, did not advance much in intelligence, even after the discovery of printing: for new works, which should have been designed for popular purposes, were still locked up in a language which none spoke, and only the scholar read; and this notwithstanding a noble example had been set by the Italians to the other nations of Europe. In the early days of our printing, the vernacular productions of the press were thrown out to amuse the children of society, fashioned as their toys. We have an abundance of poetical and prose *facetiæ*, all of which were solely adapted to the popular taste, and some of the writers of which were eminent persons. Few but have heard of "the Merry Tales of the Madmen of Gotham," and of "Scogin's Jests, full of witty mirth and pleasant shifts." These facetious works are said to be "gathered" by Andrew Borde,* a physician and humorist of a very original cast of mind, and who professedly wrote for "the Commonwealth" (that is, the people) many other works on graver topics, not less seasoned with drolleries. He was the first who composed medical treatises in the vernacular idiom. His "Breviarie of Health" is a medical dictionary,

* A calamity to which wits are incident is that of having their names prefixed to collections to give them currency. I do not know whether this has not happened to our author. "The Merry Tales of the Madmen of Gotham" are, no doubt, of great antiquity: they are characterized by a peculiar simplicity of silliness. "Scogin's Jests," of the sixty which we have, a very few tradition may have preserved: but they must have received, in the course of time, the addition of pointless jests, tales marred in the telling, and some things neither jest nor tale; and it is remarkable that these are always accompanied by an inane moralization, while the more tolerable appear to be preserved in their original condition. Some future researcher may be so fortunate as to compare them with the first editions, if they exist.

John Scogin was a gentleman of good descent, who was invited to court by Edward the Fourth for the pleasantry of his wit: he was a caustic Democritus, and gave rise to a proverbial phrase, "What says Scogin?" If he usually said two-thirds of what is ascribed to him in this volume, he had never given rise to a proverb. "The Merry Tales of the Madmen of Gotham" have been recently reprinted by Mr. Halliwell.

and held to be a "jewel" in his time, as Fuller records. In this alphabetical list of all diseases, his philosophy reaches to the diseases of the mind, whose cure he combines with that of the body; the medicine and the satire often pleasantly illustrating each other. From the "Dietarie of Health" the modern apostles of regimen might expand their own revelations: it contains many curious matters, not only on diet, but on the whole system of domestic economy, even to the building of a house, regulating a family, and choosing a good air to dwell in, &c. Another of his books, "the Introduction of Knowledge," is a miscellany of great curiosity, describing the languages and manners of different countries: in it are specimens of the Cornish, Welsh, Irish, and Scotch languages, as also of the Turkish and Egyptian, and others, and the value of their coins. The apt yet concise discrimination of the national character of every people is true to the hour we are writing.

The writings of Borde incidentally preserve curious notices of the domestic life and of the customs and arts of that period. Whitaker, in his history of Whalley, has referred to his directions for the construction of great houses, in illustration of our domestic architecture. In all his little books, much there is which the antiquary and the philosopher would not willingly pass by.

Andrew Borde was one of those eccentric geniuses who live in their own sphere, moving on principles which do not guide the routine of society. He was a Carthusian friar: his hair-shirt, however, could never mortify his unvarying facetiousness; but, if he ever rambled in his wits, he was a wider rambler, even beyond the boundaries of Christendom, "a thousand or two and more myles;" an extraordinary feat in his day. He took his degree at Montpelier, was incorporated at Oxford, and admitted into the College of Physicians in London, and was among the physicians of Henry the Eighth. His facetious genius could not conceal the real

learning and the practical knowledge which he derived from personal observation. Borde has received hard measure from our literary historians. This ingenious scholar has been branded by Warton as a mad physician. To close the story of one who was all his days so facetious, we find that this Momus of philosophers died in the Fleet. This was the fate of a great humorist, neither wanting in learning or genius.

It is said that such was his love of "the commonwealth," that he sometimes addressed them from an open stage, in a sort of gratuitous lecture, as some amateurs of our own days have delighted to deliver; and from whence has been handed down to us the term of "MERRY-ANDREW."

In the limited circles which then divided society, the taste for humor was very low. We had not yet reached to the witty humors of Shakspeare and Jonson. Sir Thomas More's "Long Story," in endless stanzas, which Johnson has strangely placed among the specimens of the English language, was held as a tale of "infinite conceit," assuredly, by the great author himself, who seems to have communicated this sort of taste to one of his family. Rastall, the learned printer, brother-in-law of More, and, farther, the grave abbreviator of the statutes in English, issued from his press in 1525 "the Widow Edith's Twelve Merrie Gestys." She was a tricking widow, renowned for her "lying, weeping, and laughing;" an ancient mumper, who had triumphed over the whole state spiritual and the temporality; travelling from town to town in the full practice of dupery and wheedling, to the admiration of her numerous victims. The arts of cheatery were long held to be facetious: most of the "Merrie Jests" consist of stultifying fools, or are sharping tricks practised on the simple children of dupery. There is a stock of this base coinage. This taste for dupery was carried down to a much later period; for the "Merrie Conceited Jests of George Peele" and of Tarleton are chiefly tricks of sharpers.

"The Hye Way to the Spyttel Hous," or, as we should say, "the road to ruin," exposes the mysteries and craft of the venerable brotherhood of mendicancy and imposture; their ingenious artifices to attract the eye, and their secret orgies, concealed by midnight: all that flourishes now in St. Giles's, flourished then in the Barbican. Not long after, we have the first vocabulary of cant language, of "the Fraternitye of Vacabondes," whose honorary titles cannot be yet placed in Burke's Extinct Peerage.

There were attacks on the fair sex in those days, which were parried by their eulogies. We seem to have been early engaged in that battle of the sexes, where the perfections or the imperfections of the female character offered themes for a libel or a panegyric. From the days of Boccaccio, the Italians have usually paid their tribute to "illustrious women," notwithstanding the free insinuations of some malicious novelists: that people preceded, in the refinement of social life, the *tramontani*. England and France, in their ruder circle of society, contracted a cynicism, which appears in a variety of invectives and apologies for the beautiful sex.

One of the most popular attacks of this sort was "the School-house of Women;" a severe satire, published anonymously. One of the heaviest charges is their bitter sarcasm on the new dresses of their friends. The author, one Edward Gosynhyll, charmed, no doubt, by his successful onset, and proud in his victory, threw off the mask: mending his ambidextrous pen for "the Praise of all Women," called "Mulierum Pean," he acknowledged himself to be the writer of "the School-house." Probably he thought he might now do so with impunity, as he was making the *amende honorable*. Whether this saved the trembling Orpheus from the rage of the Bacchantes, our scanty literary history tells not; but his defence is not considered as the least able among several elicited by his own attack.

"The Wife lapped in Morels' Skins, or the Taming of a Shrew," was the favorite tale of the Petruchios of those days, where a haughty dame is softened into a degrading obedience by the brutal command of her mate; a tale which some antiquaries still chuckle over, who have not been so venturous as this hero.*

All these books, written for the people, were at length consumed by the hands of their multitudinous readers: we learn, indeed, in Anthony à Wood's time, that some had descended to the stalls; but, at the present day, some of these rare fugitive pieces may be unique. This sort of pamphlet, Burton, the anatomist of melancholy, was delighted to heap together; and the collection formed by such a keen relish of popular humors he actually bequeathed to the Bodleian Library, where, if they are kept together, they would answer the design of the donor; otherwise such domestic records of the humors and manners of the age, diffused among the general mass, would bear only the value of their rarity.

* Several of these pieces are preserved in Mr. Utterson's "Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry." This attack on women proved not a theme less fertile among our neighbors: how briskly the skirmish was carried on, the notice of a single writer will show: "Alphabet de l'Imperfection et Malice des Femmes, par J. Olivier, licencier aux loix, et en droit-canon," 1617; three editions of which appeared in the course of two years. This blow was repelled by "Defense des Femmes contre l'Alphabet de leur pretendue Malice," by Vigoureux, 1617: the first author rejoined with a "Réponse aux Impertinences de l'Aposté Capitaine Vigoureux," by Olivier, 1617. The fire was kept up by an ally of Olivier, in "Réplique à l'Anti-Malice du Sieur Vigoureux," by De la Bruyere, 1617. At a period earlier than this conflict, the French had, as well as ourselves, many works on the subject.

THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY A PRIMITIVE AUTHOR.

SIR THOMAS ELYOT is the first English prose-writer who avowedly attempted to cultivate the language of his country. We track the prints of the first weak footsteps in this new path; and we detect the aberrations of a mind intent on a great popular design, but still vague and uncertain, often opposed by contemporaries, yet cheered by the little world of his readers.

ELYOT for us had been little more than a name, as have been many retired students, from the negligence of contemporaries, had he not been one of those interesting authors who have let us into the history of their own minds, and either prospectively have delighted to contemplate on their future enterprises, or retrospectively have exulted in their past labors.

This amiable scholar had been introduced at court early in life: his "great friend and crony was Sir Thomas More;" so plain Anthony à Wood indicates the familiar intercourse of two great men. Elyot was a favorite with Henry the Eighth, and employed on various embassies, particularly on the confidential one to Rome to negotiate the divorce of Queen Katherine. To his public employments he alludes in his first work, "the Governor," which "he had gathered as well of the sayings of most noble authors, Greek and Latin, as by his own experience; he being continually trained in some daily affairs of the public weal from his childhood."

A passion for literature seems to have prevailed over the ambition of active life; and, on his return from his last

embassy, he decided to write books "in our vulgar tongue," on a great variety of topics, to instruct his countrymen. The diversity of his reading, and an unwearied pen, happily qualified, in this early age of the literature of a nation, a student who was impatient to diffuse that knowledge which he felt he only effectually possessed in the degree and in the space which he communicated it.

His first elaborate work is entitled "the Boke of the Governor, devised by Sir Thomas Elyot," 1531; a work once so popular, that it passed through seven or eight editions, and is still valued by the collectors of our ancient literature.

"The Governor" is one of those treatises, which, at an early period of civilization, when general education is imperfect, becomes useful to mould the manners and to inculcate the morals which should distinguish the courtier and the statesman. Elyot takes his future "Governor" in the arms of his nurse, and places the ideal being amid all the scenes which may exercise the virtues, or the studies which he develops. The work is dedicated to Henry the Eighth. The design, the imaginary personage, the author, and the patron are equally dignified. The style is grave; and it would not be candid in a modern critic to observe, that, in the progress of time, the good sense has become too obvious, and the perpetual illustrations from ancient history too familiar. The erudition in philology of that day has become a schoolboy's learning. They had then no other volumes to recur to, of any authority, but what the ancients had left.

Elyot had a notion, that, for the last thousand years, the world had deteriorated, and that the human mind had not expanded through the course of ages. When he compared the writers of this long series of centuries, the babbling though the subtle schoolmen, who had chained us down to their artificial forms, with the great authors of antiquity, there seemed an appearance of truth in his decision. Christianity had not yet exhibited to modern Europe the refined morali-

ties of Seneca, and the curious knowledge of Plutarch, in the homilies of saints and fathers; nor had its histories of man, confined to our monkish annalists, emulated the narrative charms of Livy nor the grandeur of Tacitus. Of the poets of antiquity, Elyot declared that the English language, at the time he wrote, could convey nothing equivalent; wanting even words to express the delicacies, "the turns," and the euphony of the Latin verse.

A curious evidence of the jejune state of the public mind at this period appears in this volume. Here a learned and grave writer solemnly sets forth several chapters on "that honest pastime of dancing," in which he discovers a series of modern allegories. The various figures and reciprocal movements between man and woman, "holding each other by the hand," indicate the order, concord, prudence, and other virtues so necessary for the common weal. The *singles* and *reprinses* exhibit the virtue of circumspection, which excites the writer to a panegyric of the father of the reigning sovereign. These ethics of the dance contain some curious notices, and masters in the art might hence have embellished their treatises on the philosophy of dance; for "in its wonderful figures, which the Greeks do call *idea*, are comprehended so many virtues and noble qualities." It is amusing to observe how men willingly become the dupes of their fancies by affecting to discover motives and analogies the most unconnected imaginable with the objects themselves. Long after our polished statesman wrote, the Puritan excommunicated the sinful dancer, and detected in the graceful evolutions of "the honor," the "brawl," and the "single," with all their moral movements, the artifices of Satan, and the perdition of the souls of two partners, dancing too well. It was the mode of that age thus to moralize or allegorize on the common acts of life, and to sanction their idlest amusements by some religious motive. At this period, in France, we find a famous *Veneur*, Gaston Phebus, opening his treatise on "hunting" in the spirit that

Elyot had opened to us the mysteries of dancing. "By hunting, we escape from the seven mortal sins; and therefore, the more we hunt, the salvation of our souls will be the more secure. Every good hunter in this world will have joyance, glee, and solace (*joyeuseté, liesse, et deduit*), and secure himself a place in Paradise, not perhaps in the midst, but in the suburbs, because he has shunned idleness, the root of all evil."

"The Boke of the Governor" must now be condemned to the solitary imprisonment of the antiquary's cell, who will pick up many curious circumstances relative to the manners of the age, — always an amusing subject of speculation, when we contemplate on the gradations of social life. I suspect the world owed "the Governor" to a book more famous than itself, — the "Cortegiano" of Castiglione, which appeared two years before the first edition of this work of Elyot, and to whose excellence Elyot could have been no stranger in his embassies to his holiness and to the emperor. But of "the Governor" and "the Cortegiano" what can we now say, but that three centuries are fatal to the immortality of volumes, which, in the infancy of literature, seemed to have flattered themselves with a perpetuity of fame?

It was, however, a generous design, in an age of Latin, to attempt to delight our countrymen by "the vulgar tongue;" but these "first-fruits," as he calls them, gave their author a taste of the bitterness of "that tree of knowledge."

In a subsequent work, "Of the Knowledge which maketh a Wise Man," Elyot has recorded how he had laid himself open to "the vulgar." In the circle of a court there was equal peril in moralizing, which was deemed to be a rebuke, as in applying rusty stories, which were considered as nothing less than disguised personalities. "The Boke" was not thankfully received. The *persifleurs*, those butterflies who carry waspish stings, accounted Sir Thomas to be of no little presumption, that, "in noting other men's vices, he should correct *magnificat*." This odd neologism of "magnificat" was a mystical

coinage, which circulated among these aristocratic exclusives, who, as Elyot describes them, "like a galled horse abiding no plaisters, be always knapping and kicking at such examples and sentences as they do feel sharp or do bite them." The chapters on "the Diversity of Flatterers," and similar subjects, had made many "a galled jade wince;" and, in applying the salve, he got a kick for the cure. They wondered why the knight wrote at all! "Other much wiser men, and better learned than he, do forbear to write any thing." They inscribed modern names to his ancient portraits. The worried author exclaims, "There be Gnathos in Spain as well as in Greece, Pasquils in England as well as in Rome, &c. If men will seek for them in England which I set in other places, I cannot let (hinder) them." But in another work, — "Image of Governance," 1540, — when he detailed "the monstrous living of the Emperor Heliogabalus," and contrasted that gross epicurean with Severus, such a bold and open execration of the vices of a luxurious court could not avoid being obvious to the royal sensualist and his companions, however the character and the tale were removed to a bygone age.

In this early attempt to cultivate "the vulgar tongue," some cavilled at his strange terms. It is a striking instance of the simplicity of the critics at that early period of our language, that our author formally explains the word *maturity*, — "a Latin word, which I am constrained to usurp, lacking a name in English, and which, though it be strange and dark, yet may be understood as other words late comen out of Italy and France, and made denizens among us." Augustus Cæsar, it seems, had frequently in his mouth this word *matura*, — "do maturely!" as "if he should have said, Do neither too much nor too little, too swiftly nor too slowly." Elyot would confine the figurative Latin term to a metaphysical designation of the acts of men in their most perfect state; "reserving," as he says, "the word 'ripeness' to fruit and other things,

separate from affairs, as we have now in usage." Elyot exults in having augmented the English language by the introduction of this Latin term, now made English for the first time. It has flourished as well as this other, "the *redolent* savors of sweet herbs and flowers." But his ear was not always musical, and some of his neologisms are less graceful,—"*an alective*," to wit; "*fatigate*," to fatigue; "*ostent*," to show, and to "*sufficate* some disputation." Such were the first weak steps of the fathers of our language, who, however, culled for us many a flower among their cockle.

But a murmur more prejudicial arose than the idle cavil of new and hard words; for some asserted that "the Boke seemed to be overlong." Our primeval author considered that "knowledge of wisdom cannot be shortly declared." Elyot had not yet attained, by sufficient practice in authorship, the secret, that the volume which he had so much pleasure in writing could be over-tedious in reading. "For those," he observes sarcastically, "who be well willing, it is soon learned; in good faith, sooner than primero or gleek." The nation must have then consisted of young readers, when a diminutive volume in twelves was deemed to be "overlong." In this apology for his writings, he threw out an undaunted declaration of his resolution to proceed with future volumes: "If the readers of my works, by the noble example of our most dear sovereign lord, do justly and lovingly interpret my labors, I, during the residue of my life, will now and then set forth such fruits of my study, profitable, as I trust, unto this my country, leaving malicious readers with their incurable fury." Such was the innocent criticism of our earliest writer: his pen was hardly tipped with gall.

As all subjects were equally seductive to the artless pen of a primitive author, who had yet no rivals to encounter in public, Elyot turned his useful studies to a topic very opposite to that of political ethics. He put forth "the Castle of Health," a medical treatise, which passed through nearly as

many honorable editions as "the Governor." It did not, however, abate the number, though it changed the character of his cavillers, who were now the whole corporate body of the physicians!

The author has told his amusing story in the preface to a third edition, in 1541:—

"Why should I be grieved with reproaches wherewith some of my country do recompense me for my labors, taken without hope of temporal reward, only for the fervent affection which I have ever borne toward the public weal of my country? 'A worthy matter!' saith one. 'Sir Thomas Elyot has become a physician, and writeth on physic, which beseemeth not a knight: he might have been much better occupied.' Truly, if they will call him a physician who is studious of the weal of his country, let men so name me."

But there was no shame in studying this science, or setting forth any book, being—

"Thereto provoked by the noble example of my noble master, King Henry VIII.; for his highness hath not disdained to be the chief author of an introduction to grammar for the children of his subjects.

"If physicians be angry that I have written physic in English, let them remember that Greeks wrote in Greek, the Romans in Latin, and Avicenna in Arabic, which were their own proper and maternal tongues. These were paynims and Jews; but, in this part of charity, they far surmounted us Christians."

Several years after, when our author reverted to his "Castle of Health," the Castle was brightened by the beams of public favor. Its author now exulted that "it shall long preserve men, be some physicians never so angry." The work had not been intended to depreciate medical professors, but "for their commodity, by instructing the sick, and observing a good order in diet, preventing the great causes of sickness, or by which they could the sooner be cured." Our philoso-

pher had attempted to draw aside that mystifying veil with which some affected to envelop the arcana of medicine, as if they were desirous "of writing in cipher that none but themselves could read." Our author had anticipated that revolution in medical science which afterwards, at a distant period, has been productive of some of the ablest treatises in the vernacular languages of Europe.

The patriotic studies of Elyot did not terminate in these ethical and popular volumes; for he had taxed his daily diligence for his country's weal. This appeared in "the Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot, 1535," a folio, which laid the foundation of our future lexicons, "declaring Latin by English," as Elyot describes his own labor.

Elyot had suffered some disappointments as a courtier in the days of Wolsey, who lavished the royal favors on churchmen. In a letter to Lord Cromwell, he describes himself with a very narrow income, supporting his establishment, "equal to any knight in the country where I dwell who have much more to live on;" but a new office, involving considerable expense in its maintenance, to which he had been just appointed, he declares would be his ruin, having already discharged "five honest and tall personages." — "I wot not by what malice of fortune I am constrained to be in that office, whereunto is, as it were, appendent loss of money and good name, all sharpness and diligence in justice now-a-days being everywhere odious." And this was at a time when "I trusted to live quietly, and by little and little to repay my creditors, and *to reconcile myself to mine old studies.*"

This letter conveys a favorable impression of the real character of this learned man: but Elyot had condescended abjectly to join with the herd in the general scramble for the monastic lands; and, if he feigned poverty, the degradation is not less. There are cruel epochs in a great revolution; moments of trial which too often exhibit the lofty philosopher shrinking into one of the people. It is probable that he suc-

ceeded in his petition; for I find his name among the commissioners appointed to make a general inquiry after lands belonging to the church, as also to the colleges of the universities, in 1534.

But, in this day of weakness, Elyot sunk far lower than petitioning for suppressed lands. Elyot was suspected of inclining to Popery, and being adverse to the new order of affairs. His former close intimacy with Sir Thomas More contributed to this suspicion; and now, it is sad to relate, he renounces this ancient and honorable friendship! Peter denied his Master. "I beseech your good lordship now to lay apart the remembrance of the amity betwixt me and Sir Thomas More, which was but *usque ad aras*, as is the proverb; considering that I was never so much addicted unto him as I was unto truth and fidelity towards my sovereign lord." Was the influence of such illustrious friendships to be confined to chimney-corners? Had Elyot not listened to the wisdom, and revered the immutable fortitude, of "his great friend and crony"? — he, the stern moralist, who, in his "Governor," had written a remarkable chapter on "the constancy of friends," and had illustrated that passion by the romantic tale of Titus and Gesippus, where the personal trials of both parties far exceed those of the Damon and Pythias of antiquity, and are so eloquently developed and so exquisitely narrated by the great Italian novelist.

The literary history of Sir Thomas Elyot exhibits the difficulties experienced by a primitive author in the earliest attempts to open a new path to the cultivation of a vernacular literature; and it seems to have required all the magnanimity of our author to sustain his superiority among his own circle, by disdaining their petulant criticism, and by the honest confidence he gathered, as he proceeded, in the successive editions of his writings.

SKELTON.

At a period when satire had not yet assumed any legitimate form, a singular genius appeared in Skelton. His satire is peculiar; but it is stamped by vigorous originality. The fertility of his conceptions in his satirical or his humorous vein is thrown out in a style created by himself. The Skeltonical short verse, contracted into five or six and even four syllables, is wild and airy. In the quick-returning rhymes, the playfulness of the diction, and the pungency of new words, usually ludicrous, often expressive, and sometimes felicitous, there is a stirring spirit which will be best felt in an audible reading. The velocity of his verse has a carol of its own. The chimes ring in the ear, and the thoughts are flung about like coruscations. But the magic of the poet is confined to his spell: at his first step out of it, he falls to the earth, never to recover himself. Skelton is a great creator only when he writes what baffles imitation; for it is his fate, when touching more solemn strains, to betray no quality of a poet, — inert in imagination, and naked in diction. Whenever his Muse plunges into the long measure of heroic verse, she is drowned in no Heliconian stream. Skelton seems himself aware of his miserable fate; and repeatedly, with great truth, if not with some modesty, complains of —

"Mine homely rudeness and dryness."

But when he returns to his own manner and his own rhyme, when he riots in the wantonness of his prodigal genius, irresistible and daring, the poet was not unconscious of his faculty; and truly he tells, —

"Though my rime be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rain-beaten,
Rusty, moth-eaten,
If ye take well therewith,
It hath in it some pith."

Whether Skelton really adopted the measures of the old tavern-minstrelsy used by harpers, who gave "a fit of mirth for a groat," or "carols for Christmas," or "lascivious poems for bride-ales," as Puttenham, the arch-critic of Elizabeth's reign, supposes; or whether in Skelton's introduction of alternate Latin lines among his verses he caught the Macaronic caprice of the Italians, as Warton suggests, — the Skeltonical style remains his own undisputed possession. He is a poet who has left his name to his own verse, — a verse airy, but pungent; so admirably adapted for the popular ear, that it has been frequently copied,* and has led some eminent critics into singular misconceptions. The minstrel tune of the Skeltonical rhyme is easily caught; but the invention of style and "the pith" mock these imitators. The facility of doggerel merely

* George Ellis, although an elegant critic, could not relish "the Skeltonical minstrelsy." In an extract from a manuscript poem ascribed to Skelton, "the Image of Hypocrisy," and truly Skeltonical in every sense, he condemned it as "a piece of obscure and unintelligible ribaldry;" and so, no doubt, it has been accepted. But the truth is, the morsel is of exquisite poignancy, pointed at Sir Thomas More's controversial writings, to which the allusions in every line might be pointed out. As these works were written after the death of Skelton, the merit entirely remains with this fortunate imitator.

In the public rejoicings at the defeat of the Armada, in 1589, a ludicrous bard poured forth his patriotic effusions in what he called "a Skeltonical Salutation, or Condign Gratulation," of the Spaniard, who, he says, —

"In a bravado
Spent many a crusado."

In a reprint of the poem of "Elynoure Rummynge," in 1624, which may be found in the "Harl. Miscellany," vol. i., there is a poem prefixed, which ridicules the lovers of tobacco: this anachronism betrays the imitator. At the close, there are some verses from the Ghost of Skelton; but we believe it is a real ghost.

of itself could not have yielded the exuberance of his humor and the mordacity of his satire.

This singular writer has suffered the mischance of being too original for some of his critics; they looked on the surface, and did not always suspect the depths they glided over: the legitimate taste of others has revolted against the mixture of the ludicrous and the invective. A taste for humor is a rarer faculty than most persons imagine: where it is not indigenous, no art of man can plant it. There is no substitute for such a volatile existence; and, where even it exists in a limited degree, we cannot enlarge its capacity for reception. A great master of humor, who observed from his experience, has solemnly told us, that "it is not in the power of every one to taste humor, however he may wish it, — it is the gift of God; and a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him."*

Puttenham was the first critic who prized Skelton cheaply: the artificial and courtly critic of Elizabeth's reign could not rightly estimate such a wild and irregular genius. The critic's fastidious ear listens to nothing but the jar of rude rhymes, while the courtier's delicacy shrinks from the nerve of appalling satire. "Such," says this critic, "are the rhymes of Skelton, usurping the name of a poet-laureate; being indeed but a rude rayling rhimer, and all his doings ridiculous, — pleasing only the popular ear." This affected critic never suspected "the pith" of "the ridiculous;" the grotesque humor covering the dread invective which shook a Wolsey under his canopy. Another Elizabethan critic, the obsequious Meres, re-echoes the dictum. These opinions perhaps prejudiced the historian of our poetry, who seems to have appreciated them as the echoes of the poet's contemporaries. Yet we know how highly his contemporaries prized him, notwithstanding the host whom he provoked. One poetical brother† distinguishes him as "the inventive Skelton;"

* Sterne. † Henry Bradshaw. "Warton," iii. 18.

and we find the following full-length portrait of him by another: * —

"A poet for his art,
Whose judgment sure was high,
And had great practise of the pen;
His works they will not lie:
His termes to taunts did leane,
His talk was as he wrate,
Full quick of wit, right sharpe of wordes,
And skilful of the state;
. . . . . .
And to the hateful minde,
That did disdaine his doings still,
A scorner of his kinde."

When Dr. Johnson observed that "Skelton cannot be said to have attained great elegance of language," he tried Skelton by a test of criticism at which Skelton would have laughed, and "jangled and wrangled." Warton has also censured him for adopting "the familiar phraseology of the common people." The learned editor of Johnson's "Dictionary" corrects both our critics. "If Skelton did not attain great elegance of language, he, however, possessed great knowledge of it. From his works may be drawn an abundance of terms which were then in use among the vulgar as well as the learned, and which no other writer of his time so obviously (and often so wittily) illustrated. Skelton seems to have been fully aware of the condition of our vernacular idiom when he wrote; for he has thus described it: —

"Our natural tongue is rude,
And hard to be enneude
With polished termes lusty;
Our language is so rusty,
So cankered, and so full
Of frowards, and so dull,
That, if I would apply
To write ordinately,
I wot not where to find
Terms to serve my mind."

* Thomas Churchyard.

It was obviously his design to be as great a creator of words as he was of ideas. Many of his mintage would have given strength to our idiom. Caxton, as a contemporary, is some authority that Skelton improved the language.

Let not the reader imagine that Skelton was only "a rude rayling rhimer." Skelton was the tutor of Henry the Eighth; and one who knew him well describes him as —

"Seldom out of prince's grace."

Erasmus distinguished him "as the light and ornament of British letters;" and one, he addresses the royal pupil, "who can not only excite your studies, but complete them." Warton attests his classical attainments: "Had not his propensity to the ridiculous induced him to follow the whimsies of Walter Mapes, Skelton would have appeared among the first writers of Latin poetry in England." Skelton chose to be himself; and this is what the generality of his critics have not taken in their view.

Skelton was an ecclesiastic who was evidently among those who had adopted the principles of reformation before the Reformation. With equal levity and scorn, he struck at the friars from his pulpit or in his ballad, he ridiculed the Romish ritual, and he took unto himself that wife who was to be called a concubine. To the same feelings we may also ascribe the declamatory invective against Cardinal Wolsey, from whose terrible arm he flew into the sanctuary of Westminster, where he remained protected by Abbot Islip until his death, which took place in 1529, but a few short months before the fall of Wolsey. It is supposed that the king did not wholly dislike the levelling of the greatness of his overgrown minister; and it is remarkable that one of the charges subsequently brought by the council in 1529 against Wolsey — his imperious carriage at the council-board — is precisely one of the accusations of our poet, only divested of rhyme;

whence, perhaps, we may infer that Skelton was an organ of the rising party.

"Why come you not to Court?"—that daring state-picture of an omnipotent minister,—and "the Boke of Colin Clout," where the poet pretends only to relate what the people talk about the luxurious clergy, and seems to be half the reformer, are the most original satires in the language. In the days when Skelton wrote these satires, there appeared a poem known by the title of "Reade me, and be not Wrothe;" a voluminous invective against the cardinal and the Romish superstitions, which has been ascribed by some to Skelton. The writer was WILLIAM ROY, a friar. The genius, though not the zeal, of ROY and SKELTON are far apart,—as far as the buoyancy of racy originality is removed from the downright earnestness of grave mediocrity. Roy had been the learned assistant of Tyndale in the first edition of the translation of the New Testament, and it was the public conflagration at London of that whole edition which aroused his indignant spirit. The satire, which had been printed abroad, was diligently suppressed by an emissary of the cardinal purchasing up all the copies; and few were saved from the ravage:* the author, however, escaped out of the country.

In "the Crown of Lawrell," Skelton has himself furnished a catalogue of his numerous writings, the greater number of which have not come down to us. Literary productions were at that day printed on loose sheets or in small pamphlets, which the winds seem to have scattered. We learn there of

* After the death of the cardinal, it was reprinted, in 1546; but the satire was weakened, being transferred from Wolsey, and wholly laid on the clergy. The very rare first edition is reprinted in the "Harleian Miscellany," by Parke, vol. ix. Tyndale has reproached his colleague with being somewhat artful and mutable in his friendships: but the wandering man proved the constancy of his principles; for, as a heretic, he perished at the stake in Portugal.

his graver labors. He composed the "Speculum Principis" for his royal pupil —

"To bear in hand, therein to read;" —

and he translated Diodorus Siculus, —

"Six volumes engrossed it doth contain."

To have composed a manual for the education of a prince, and to have persevered through a laborious version, are sufficient evidence that the learned Skelton had his studious days as well as his hours of caustic jocularity. He appears to have written various pieces for the court entertainment; but for us exists only an account of the interlude of the "Nigramansir," in the pages of Warton, and a single copy of the goodly interlude of "Magnificence,"* in the Garrick collection. If we accept his abstract personations merely as the names, and not the qualities, of the dramatic personages, "Magnificence" approaches to the true vein of comedy.

Skelton was, however, probably more gratified by his own Skeltonical style, moulding it with the wantonness of power on whatever theme, comic or serious. In a poem remarkable for its elegant playfulness, a very graceful maiden, whose loveliness the poet has touched with the most vivid coloring, grieving over the fate of her sparrow from its feline foe, chants a dirige, a Paternoster, and an Ave Maria, for its soul, and the souls of all sparrows. In this discursive poem, which glides from object to object, in the vast abundance of fancy, a general mourning of all the birds in the air, and many allusions to the old romances, "Philip Sparrow," for its elegance, may be placed by the side of "Lesbia's Bird," and, for its playfulness, by the "Vert Vert" of Gresset.

But Skelton was never more vivid than in his "Ale-wife," and all —

"The mad mummyng
Of Elynour Rummyng," —

* It has passed through a reprint by the Roxburgh Club.

a piece which has been more frequently reprinted than any of his works. It remains a morsel of poignant relish for the antiquary, still enamoured of the portrait of this grisly dame of Leatherhead, where her name and her domicile still exist. Such is the immortality a poet can bestow.* "The Tunnyng of Elynoure Rummyng" is a remarkable production of THE GROTESQUE, or the low burlesque; the humor as low as you please, but as strong as you can imagine. Cleland is reported, in Spence's Anecdotes of Pope, to have said that this "Tunnyng of Elynoure Rummyng" was taken from a poem of Lorenzo de' Medici. There is indeed a jocose satire by that noble bard, entitled "I Beoni," "the Topers;" an elegant piece of playful humor, where the characters are a company of thirsty souls hastening out of the gates of Florence to a treat of excellent wine. It was printed by the Giunti, in 1568;† and therefore this burlesque piece could never have been known to Skelton. The manners of our Alewife and her gossips are purely English, and their contrivances to obtain their potations such as the village of Leatherhead would afford.

The latest edition of Skelton was published in the days of Pope, which occasioned some strictures in conversation from the great poet. The laureated poet of Henry the Eighth is styled "beastly:" probably Pope alluded to this minute portrait of "Elynoure Rummynge" and her crowd of customers. Beastliness should have been a delicate subject for censure from Pope. But surely Pope had never read Skelton; for could that great poet have passed by the playful graces of

* A noble amateur laid on the shrine of this antiquated beauty £20 to possess her rare portrait; and, on the republication of this portrait, Steevens wrote some sarcastic verses on the print-collectors in the "European Mag.," 1794: they show this famous commentator to have been a polished wit, though he pronounced the Sonnets of Shakspeare unreadable. These verses have been reprinted in Dibdin's "Bibliomania."

† Roscoe's "Lorenzo de' Medici," i. 290.

"Philip Sparrow" only to remember the broad gossips of "Elynoure Rummyng"?

The amazing contrast of these two poems is the most certain evidence of the extent of the genius of the poet: he who with copious fondness dwelt on a picture which rivals the gracefulness of Albano, could with equal completeness give us the drunken gossipers of an Ostade. It is true, that in the one we are more than delighted, and in the other we are more than disgusted; but, in the impartiality of philosophical criticism, we must award that none but the most original genius could produce both. It is this which entitles our bard to be styled the "inventive Skelton."

But are personal satires and libels of the day deserving the attention of posterity? I answer, that for posterity there are no satires nor libels. We are concerned only with human nature. When the satirical is placed by the side of the historical character, they reflect a mutual light. We become more intimately acquainted with the great cardinal by laying together the satire of the mendacious Skelton with the domestic eulogy of the gentle Cavendish. The interest which posterity takes is different from that of contemporaries; our vision is more complete: they witnessed the beginnings, but we behold the ends. We are no longer deceived by hyperbolical exaggeration, or inflamed by unsparing invective: the ideal personage of the satirist is compared with the real one of the historian, and we touch only delicate truths. What Wolsey was, we know; but how he was known to his own times, and to the people, we can only gather from the private satirist: corrected by the passionless arbiter of another age, the satirist becomes the useful historian of the man.

The extraordinary combination in the genius of Skelton was that of two most opposite and potent faculties, — the hyperbolical ludicrous masking the invective. He acts the character of a buffoon; he talks the language of drollery; he

even mints a coinage of his own, to deepen the colors of his extravagance: and all this was for the people! But his hand conceals a poniard; his rapid gestures only strike the deeper into his victim, and we find that the Tragedy of the State has been acted while we were only lookers-on before a stage erected for the popular gaze.*

* The first collection of some of the works of Skelton was made by Thomas Marshe, in 1568. Another edition, by an unknown editor, was in 1736; the text of which is, as Gifford justly observed, execrable. Many of his writings still remain in their manuscript state (see Harleian MSS. 367, 2,252), and many printed ones have not been collected. There is no task in our literature so desperately difficult as that of offering a correct text of this anomalous poet; but we may hope to receive it from the diligent labors of Mr. Dyce, so long promised: it would form one of the richest volumes of the Camden publications. [Since this note was written, the poetical works of Skelton have been published by the Rev. A. Dyce (2 vols. 8vo, T. Rodd, 1843), with an abundance of elucidatory notes and bibliographical information: so that this difficult task has been performed with great success; and the volumes are among the most valuable of the many works of that conscientious editor.]

THE SHIP OF FOOLS.

THE "Stultifera Navis," or "Ship of Fools," composed in verse by Sebastian Brandt, a learned German civilian, is a general satire on society. It has been translated into verse, or turned into prose, in almost every European language; and no work of such dimensions has been made so familiar to general readers.

There are works whose design displays the most striking originality; but, alas! there are so many infelicitous modes of execution! To freight a ship with fools, collected from all the classes and professions of society, would have been a creative idea in the brain of Lucian, or another pilgrimage for the personages of Chaucer; and natural or grotesque incidents would have started from the invention of Rabelais. These men of genius would have sportively navigated their "Ship," and not have driven aboard fool after fool, an undistinguishable shoal, by the mere brutal force of the pen, only to sermonize with a tedious homily or a tritical declamation. Erasmus playfully threw out a small sparkling volume on folly, which we still open: Brandt furnishes a massive tome, with fools huddled together; and, while we lose our own, we are astonished at his patience.

The severity of this decision, we own, is that of a critic of the nineteenth century on an author of the sixteenth.

It is amusing to observe the perplexities of an eminent French critic, Monsieur Guizot, in his endeavor to decide on

the "Stultifera Navis." A critic of his school could not rightly comprehend how it happened that so dull a book had been a popular one, multiplied by editions in all the languages of Europe. "It is," says M. Guizot, "a collection of extravagant or of gross *plaisanteries*, which may have been poignant at their time, but which at this day have no other merit than that of having had great success three hundred years ago." The salt of plaisanteries cannot be damped by three centuries, provided they were such. But our author is by no means facetious; he is much too downright; the tone is invariably condemnatory or exhortative: and the Proverbs, the Psalms, and Jeremiah are more frequently appealed to than Cicero, Horace, and Ovid, who occasionally show their heads in his margin.

We must look somewhat deeper, would we learn why a book which now tries our patience was not undeserving of those multiplied editions which have ascertained its popularity.

At the period when this volume appeared, we in the North were far removed from the urbanity and the elevated ethics of lettered Italy. Brandt took this general view of society at the time when the illustrious Castiglione was an ambassador to our Henry the Seventh, and was meditating to model the manners of his countrymen by his "Libro dell' Cortigiano;" and La Casa, by his "Galateo," was founding a code of minute politeness. But neither France nor Germany nor England had yet greatly advanced in the civil intercourse of life, and could not appreciate such exility of elegance and such sublimated refinement. With us, the staple of our moral philosophy was of a homespun but firm texture, and had in it more of yarn than of silk. Men had little to read: they were not weary of that eternal iteration of admonition on whatever was most painful or most despicable in their conduct; their ideas were uncertain, and their minds remained to be developed; nothing was trite or trivial. In his wide survey of human

life, the author addressed the mundane fools of his age in the manner level to their comprehension: the ethical character of the volume was such, that the Abbot Trithemus designated it as a divine book; and in this volume, which read like a homily, while every man beheld the reflection of his own habits and thoughts, he chuckled over the sayings and doings of his neighbors. If any one quipped the profession of another, the sufferer had only to turn the leaf to find ample revenge; and these were the causes of the uninterrupted popularity of this ethical work.

"The Ship of Fools" is, indeed, cumbrous, rude, and inartificial, and was not constructed on the principles which regulate our fast-sailing vessels; yet it may be prized for something more than its curiosity. It is an ancient satire of that age of simplicity which must precede an age of refinement.

If man in society changes his manners, he cannot vary his species: man remains nothing but man; for, however disguised by new modes of acting, the same principles of our actions are always at work. The same follies and the same vices in their result actuate the human being in all ages; and he who turns over the volume of the learned civilian of Germany will find detailed those great moral effects in life, which, if the modern moralist may invest with more dignity, he could not have discovered with more truth. We have outgrown his counsels, but we never shall elude the vexatious consequences of his experience; and many a chapter in the "Ship of Fools" will point many an argument *ad hominum*, and awaken in the secret hours of our reminiscences the pang of contrite sorrows, or tingle our cheek with a blush for our weaknesses. The truths of human nature are ever echoing in our breasts.

"The Ship of Fools," by Alexander Barclay, — a volume of renown among literary antiquaries, and of rarity and price, — is at once a translation and an original. In octave stanza,

flowing in the ballad measure, Barclay has a natural construction of style still retaining a vernacular vigor. He is noticed by Warton for having contributed his share in the improvement of English phraseology; and, indeed, we are often surprised to discover many felicities of our native idiom; and the work, though it should be repulsive to some for its black-letter, is perfectly intelligible to a modern reader. The verse, being prosaic, preserves its colloquial ease, though with more gravity than suits sportive subjects: we sometimes feel the tediousness of the good sense of the priest of St. Mary Ottery.

The edition of 1570 of the "Ship of Fooles"* contains other productions of Barclay. In his "Eclogues,"† our good priest, who did not write, as he says, "for the laud of man," indulged his ethical and theological vein in pastoral poetry; and the interlocutors are citizens disputing with men of the country, and poets with their patrons. To have converted shepherds into scholastic disputants or town-satirists was an unnatural change: but this whimsical taste had been introduced by Petrarch and Mantuan; and the first eclogues in the English language, which Warton tells us are those of Barclay, took this strange form, — an incongruity our Spenser had not the skill to avoid, and for which Milton has been censured. The less fortunate anomalies of genius are often perpetuated by the inconsiderate imitation of those who should be most sensible of their deformity.

In the eclogues of Barclay, the country is ever represented in an impoverished, depressed state; and the splendor of the city, and the luxurious indulgence of the citizen and the

* The woodcuts in this edition are wretched; though in part they are copied from the fine specimens of the art which embellish the Latin version of Locherus.

† One of these, a "Dialogue between a Citizen and Uplandishman," has been reprinted by the Percy Society, under the editorship of Mr. Fairholt, who has given a digest of the other Eclogues in a Preface. — Ed.

courtier, offer a singular contrast to the extreme misery of the agriculturist. We may infer that the country had been deplorably ravaged or neglected in the civil wars, which, half a century afterwards, was to be covered by the fat beeves of the graziers of Elizabeth.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF SIR THOMAS MORE.

If the art of biography be the development of "the ruling passion," it is in strong characters that we must seek for the single feature. Learned and meditative as was Sir Thomas More, a jesting humor, a philosophical jocundity, indulged on important as well as on ordinary occasions, served his wise purpose. He seems to have taken refuge from the follies of other men by retreating to the pleasantry of his own. Grave men censured him for the absence of all gravity; and some imagined that the singularity of his facetious disposition, which sometimes seemed even ludicrous, was carried on to affectation. It was certainly inherent; it was a constitutional temper; it twined itself in his fibres; it betrayed itself on his countenance. We detect it from the comic vein of his boyhood, when among the players; we pursue it through the numerous transactions of his life; and we leave him at its last solemn close, when life and death were within a second of each other, uttering three jests upon the scaffold. Even when he seemed to have quitted the world, and had laid his head on the block, he bade the executioner stay his hand till he had removed his beard; observing, "that that had never committed any treason."

This mirthful mind had, indeed, settled on his features. Erasmus, who has furnished us with an enamelled portrait of More, among its minuter touches reluctantly confessed that "the countenance of Sir Thomas More was a transcript of his mind, inclining to an habitual smile;" and he adds,

"Ingenuously to confess the truth, that face is formed for the expression of mirth rather than of gravity or dignity." But, lest he should derange the gravity of the German to whom he was writing, Erasmus cautiously qualifies the disparaging delineation, — "though as far as possible removed from folly or buffoonery." MORE, however, would assume a solemn countenance when on the point of throwing out some facetious stroke. He has so described himself when an interlocutor in one of his dialogues addresses him: "You use to look so sadly when you mean merrily, that many times men doubt whether you speak in sport when you mean good earnest."*

The unaffected playfulness of the mind; the smile whose sweetness allayed the causticity of the tongue; the tingling pleasantry when pointed at persons; the pungent raillery which corrected opinions without scorn or contumely; and the art of promptly amusing the mind of another by stealing it away from a present object, — appeared not only in his conversations, but was carried into his writings.

The grave and sullen pages of the polemical labors of MORE, whose writings chiefly turn on the controversies of the Romanists and the Reformers, are perhaps the only controversial ones which exhibit in the marginal notes, frequently repeated, "a merrie tale." "A merry tale cometh never amiss to me," said MORE truly of himself. He has offered an apology for introducing this anomalous style into these controversial works. He conceived, that, as a layman, it better became him "to tell his mind merrily than more solemnly to preach." Jests, he acknowledges, are but sauce; and "it were but an absurd banquet, indeed, in which there were few dishes of meat, and much variety of sauces; but that is but an unpleasant one where there were no sauce at all."

The massive folio of Sir THOMAS MORE'S "English

* "Sir Thomas More's Workes," 127.

Works" * remains a monument of our language at a period of its pristine vigor. Viewed in active as well as in contemplative life, at the bar or on the beach, as ambassador or chancellor, and not to less advantage, where, "a good distance from his house at Chelsea, he builded the new building, wherein was a chapel, a library, and a gallery," the character, the events, and the writings of this illustrious man may ever interest us.

These works were the fertile produce of "those spare hours for writing, stolen from his meat and sleep." We are told, that, "by using much writing, towards his latter end he complained of the ache of his breast." He has himself acknowledged, that "those delicate dainty folk, the evangelical brethren" (so More calls our early reformers), "think my works too long; for every thing that is, they think too long." More alludes to the rising disposition in men for curtailing all forms and other ceremonial acts, especially in the church service.

More, however skilful as a Latin scholar, to promulgate his opinions aimed at popularity, and cultivated our vernacular idiom, till the English language seems to have enlarged the compass of its expression under the free and copious vein of the writer. It is only by the infecility of the subjects which constitute the greater portion of this mighty volume, that its author has missed the immortality which his genius had else secured.

More has been fortunate in the zeal of his biographers; but we are conscious, that, had there been a Xenophon or a Boswell among them, they could have told us much more. The conversations of Sir Thomas More were racy. His was that rare gift of nature, perfect presence of mind, deprived of which the fullest is but slow and late. His

* "The Workes of Sir Thomas More in the English Tongue, 1557, fo.," a venerable folio of nearly 1500 pages in double columns, is closely printed in black-letter.

conversancy with public affairs, combined with a close observation of familiar life, ever afforded him a striking aptitude of illustration; but the levity of his wit, and the luxuriance of his humor, could not hide the deep sense which at all times gave weight to his thoughts, and decision to his acts. Of all these we are furnished with ample evidence.

Domestic affection in all its *naïve* simplicity dictated the artless record of Roper, the companion of More, for sixteen years, and the husband of his adored daughter Margaret.* The pride of ancestry in the pages of his great-grandson, the ascetic Cresacre More, could not borrow the charm of that work whence he derived his enlarged narrative.† More than one beadsman, the votaries of their martyr, have consecrated his memory even with their legendary faith;‡ while recent and more philosophical writers have expatiated on the wide theme, and have repeated the story of this great Chancellor of England. §

"The child here waiting at table, whomever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous man." It was thus that the

* Roper's "Life of Sir Thomas More," which had been suppressed through the reign of Elizabeth, only first appeared in 1626, at Paris, when a Roman-Catholic princess in the person of Henrietta, the queen of Charles the First, had ascended the throne of England: it was republished in 1729. There is also an elegant modern reprint by Mr. Singer.

† The Life by his great-grandson was printed in 1627, and republished in 1726. This biography is the one usually referred to. Though with a more lucid arrangement and a fuller narrative than Roper's Life, the writer inherited little of the family genius, except the bigotry of his great ancestor.

‡ *Tres Thomæ.* The three Thomases are Aquinas, à Becket, and More, by Dr. Thomas Stapleton. Another Life by J. H. is an abridgment, 1662. These writers, Romanists, as well as the great-grandson, have interspersed in their narrative more than one of those fabulous incidents and pious frauds, visions and miracles, which have been the opprobrium of Catholic biographers.

§ Macdiarmid, in his "Lives of British Statesmen," has chiefly considered the political character of this lord-chancellor. Others have written Lives merely as accompaniments to the editions of some of his works.

early patron of More, Cardinal Morton, sagaciously contemplated on the precocity of More's boyhood. His prompt natural humor broke out at the Christmas revels, when the boy, suddenly slipping in among the players, acted an extempore part of his own invention. Yet this jocund humor, which never was to quit him to his last awful minute, at times indulged a solemnity of thought, as remarkable in a youth of eighteen. In the taste of that day, he invented an allegorical pageant. These pageants consisted of paintings on rolls of cloth, with inscriptions in verse, descriptive of the scenical objects. They formed a series of the occupations of childhood, manhood, the indolent liver, "a child again," and old age, thin and hoar, wise and discreet. The last scenes exhibited more original conceptions. The image of DEATH, where under his "misshapen feet" lay the sage old man: then came "the Lady FAME," boasting that she had survived death, and would preserve the old man's name "by the voice of the people." But FAME was followed by TIME, "the lord of every hour, the great destroyer both of sea and land," deriding simple "Fame;" for "who shall boast an eternal name before me?" Yet was there a more potent destroyer than TIME: Time itself was mortal! and the eighth pageant revealed the triumph of ETERNITY. The last exhibited the poet himself, meditating in his chair, — he "who had fed their eyes with these fictions and these figures." The allegory of Fame, Time, and Eternity, is a sublime creation of ideal personifications. The conception of these pageants reminds one of the allegorical "Trionfi" of Petrarch; but they are not borrowed from the Italian poet. They were, indeed, in the taste of the age, and such pageants were exhibited in the streets; but the present gorgeous invention, as well as the verses, were the fancies of the youthful More.

MORE in his youth was a true poet; but in his active life he soon deserted these shadows of the imagination.

A modern critic has regretted, that, notwithstanding the

zeal of his biographers, we would gladly have been better acquainted with MORE's political life, his parliamentary speeches, his judicial decrees, and his history as an ambassador and a courtier.

There is not, however, wanting the most striking evidence of MORE's admirable independence in all these characters. I fix on his parliamentary life.

As a burgess under Henry the Seventh, he effectually opposed a royal demand for money. When the king heard that "a beardless boy had disappointed all his purpose," the malice of royalty was wreaked on the devoted head of the judge his father, in a causeless quarrel and a heavy fine. When MORE was chosen the Speaker of the Commons, he addressed Henry the Eighth on the important subject of *freedom of debate*. There is a remarkable passage on the heat of discussion, and the diversity of men's faculties, which displays a nice discrimination in human nature: "Among so many wise men, neither is every one wise alike; nor, among so many alike well-witted, every man alike well-spoken; and it often happeneth, that likewise as much folly is uttered with painted, polished speeches, so many boisterous and rude in language see deep indeed, and give right substantial counsel. And since also in matters of great importance the mind is so often occupied in the matter, that a man rather studies what to say than how, by reason whereof the wisest man and best-spoken in a whole country fortuneth, while his mind is fervent in the matter, somewhat to speak in such wise as he would afterward wish to have been uttered otherwise; and yet no worse will had he when he spake it, than he had when he would gladly change it."

Once the potent cardinal, irritated at the free language of the Commons, to awe the House, came down in person amid the blazonry of all the insignia of his multiform state. To check his arrogance, it was debated whether the minister should be only admitted with a few lords. MORE suggested,

that, as WOLSEY had lately taxed the lightness of their tongues, "it would not be amiss to receive him in all his pomp, with his (silver) pillars, emblems of his ecclesiastical power, as a pillar of the church, his maces, his pole-axes, his crosses, his hat, and his great seal too, to the intent, that, if he find the like fault with us hereafter, we may the more boldly lay the blame on those his grace brings with him." The cardinal made a solemn oration; and, when he ceased, behold the whole house was struck by one unbroken and dead silence! The minister addressed several personally, — each man was a mute: discovering that he could not carry his point by his presence, he seemed to recollect that the custom of the House was to speak by the mouth of their Speaker; and WOLSEY turned to him. MORE, in all humility, explained the cause of the universal silence, by the amazement of the House at the presence of so noble a personage; "besides, that it was not agreeable to the liberty of the House to offer answers; that he himself could return no answer, except every one of the members could put into his head their several wits." The minister abruptly rose, and departed *re infectâ*. Shortly after, WOLSEY in his gallery at Whitehall told MORE, "Would to God you had been at Rome, Mr. More, when I made you Speaker!" — "So would I too!" replied MORE; and then immediately exclaimed, "I like this gallery much better than your gallery at Hampton Court;" and thus, talking of pictures, he broke off "the cardinal's displeasant talk."

This was a customary artifice with MORE. He withdrew the mind from disturbing thoughts by some sudden exclamation, or broke out into some facetious sally, which gave a new turn to the conversation. Of many, to give a single instance. On the day he resigned the chancellorship, he went after service to his wife's pew: there bowing, in the manner and with the very words the lord-chancellor's servant was accustomed to announce to her, that "My lord was gone!" she

laughed at the idling mockery; but when assured, in sober sadness, that "My lord was gone!" this good sort of lady, with her silly exclamation of "Tilly-valley, tilly-valley!—will you sit and make goslings in the ashes?" broke out into one of those domestic explosions to which she was very liable, The resigned chancellor, now resigned in more than one sense, to allay the storm he had raised, desired his daughters to observe whether they could not see some fault in their mother's dress. They could discover none. "Don't you perceive that your mother's nose stands somewhat awry?" Thus, by a stroke of merriment, he dissipated the tedious remonstrances and perplexing inquiries which a graver man could not have eluded.

At the most solemn moments of his life, he was still disposed to indulge his humor. When in the Tower, denied pen and ink, he wrote a letter to his beloved Margaret, and tells her that "this letter is written with a coal; but that, to express his love, a peck of coals would not suffice."

His political sagacity equalled the quickness of his wit or the flow of his humor. He knew to rate at their real value the favors of such a sovereign as Henry VIII. The king suddenly came to dine at his house at Chelsea, and, while walking in the garden, threw his arm about the neck of the chancellor. Roper, his son-in-law, congratulated More on this affectionate familiarity of royalty. More observed, "Son, the king favors me as (much as) any subject within the realm: howbeit, I have no cause to be proud thereof; for, if my head would win him a castle in France, it should not fail to go!"

More seems to have descried the speck of the Reformation, while others could not view even the gathering cloud in the political horizon. He and Roper were conversing on their "Catholic prince, their learned clergy, their sound nobility, their obedient subjects, and finally that no heretic dare show his face." More went even beyond Roper in his commendation; but he proceeded, "And yet, son Roper, I

pray God that some of us, as high as we seem to sit upon the mountains, treading heretics under our feet like ants, live not the day that we would gladly be at league and composition with them, to let them have their churches quietly to themselves, so that they would be contented to let us have ours quietly to ourselves." Roper, somewhat amazed, alleged his reasons for not seeing any cause which could produce such consequences. The zeal of the juvenile Catholic broke out into "a fume;" which More perceiving, with his accustomed and gentle artifice exclaimed merrily, "Well, son Roper, it shall not be so, it shall not be so!"

No one was more sensible than MORE that to gain over the populace it is necessary to descend to them. But when raillery passed into railing, and sarcasm sunk into scurrility, in these unhappy polemical effusions, our critics have bitterly censured the intolerance and bigotry of Sir THOMAS MORE. All this, however, lies on the surface. The antagonists of MORE were not less free, nor more refined. MORE wrote at a cruel crisis: both the subjects he treated on, and the times he wrote in, and the distorted medium through which he viewed the new race as the subverters of government and the eager despoilers of the ecclesiastical lands, were quite sufficient to pervert the intellect of a sage of that day, and throw even the most genial humor into a state of exacerbation.

Our sympathies are no longer to be awakened by the worship of images and relics, prayers to saints, the state of souls in purgatory, and the unwearied blessedness of pilgrimages; nor even by the subtle inquiry, whether the church were before the gospel, or the gospel before the church; or by the burning of Tyndale's Testament, and "the confutation of the new church of Frere Barnes:" all these direful follies, which cost Sir Thomas More many a sleepless night, and bound many a harmless heretic to the stake, have passed away, only, alas! to be succeeded by other

follies as insane, which shall in their turn meet the same fate. Those works of MORE are a voluminous labyrinth; but whoever winds its dark passages shall gather many curious notices of the writer's own age, and many exquisite "merrie tales," delectable to the antiquary, and not to be contemned in the history of the human mind.

The impending Reformation was hastened by a famous invective in the form of "the Supplication of Beggars." Its flagrant argument lay in its arithmetic. It calculated all the possessions of the clergy, who, though but "the four hundredth part of the nation, yet held half of the revenues."

MORE replied to "the Supplication of the Beggars" by "the Supplications of the Souls in Purgatory." These he represented in terror at the sacrilegious annihilation of the masses said for their repose; and this, with the Romanist, was probably no weak argument in that day.

MORE more reasonably ridicules the extravagance of the estimates. Such accounts, got up in haste and designed for a particular purpose, are necessarily inaccurate; but the inaccuracy of a statement does not at all injure the drift of the argument, should that be based on truth.

With MORE "the heretics" were but ordinary rebels, as appears by the style of his narrative. "A rabble of heretics at Abingdon did not intend to lose any more labor by putting up bills (petitions) to Parliament, but to make an open insurrection and subvert all the realm, to kill the clergy, and sell priests' heads as good and cheap as sheep's heads, — three for a penny, buy who would! But God saved the church and the realm. Yet after this was there one John Goose roasted at Tower Hill; and thereupon some other John Goose began to make some gaggling awhile, but it availed him not. And now we have this gosling with his 'Supplication of Beggars.' He maketh his bill in the name of the beggars. The bill is couched as full of *lies* as the beggar swarmeth full of *lice*. We neither will nor shall need to make much business about

this matter: we trust much better in the goodness of good men."

The marriage of the clergy was no doubt at first abused by some. More describes one Richard Mayfield, late a monk and a priest, and, it may be added, a martyr; for he was burned. Of this man he says, "His holy life well declares his heresies, when, being both a priest and a monk, he went about two wives, one in Brabant, another in England. What he meant I cannot make you sure, whether he would be sure of the one if t'other should happen to refuse him; or that he would have them both, the one here, the other there; or else both in one place, the one because he was priest, the other because he was monk." *

Such is the ludicrous ribaldry which runs through the polemical works of Sir Thomas More: the opposite party set no better example, and none worse than the redoubtable Simon Fish, the writer of the "Supplication of Beggars." Oldmixon expresses his astonishment that "the famous Sir Thomas More was so hurried by his zeal, that he forgot he was a gentleman, and treated Mr. Fish with the language of a monk."

Writers who decide on other men and on other times by the spirit of their own try human affairs by a false standard. More was at heart a monk. He wore a prickly hair-shirt to mortify the flesh; he scourged himself with the knotted cord; he practised the penance; and he appeals to miraculous relics as the evidences of his faith! I give his own words in alluding to the Sudarium, — that napkin sent to King Abgarus, on which Jesus impressed the image of his own face: "And it hath been by like miracle in the thin corruptible cloth kept and preserved these 1500 years fresh and well preserved, to the inward comforts, spiritual rejoicing, and great increase of fervor, in the hearts of good Christian people." To this he

* Works, fol. 846.

joins another similar miraculous relic, "the Evangelist Luke's portrait of our blessed Lady, his mother."*

Such were considered as the evidences of the true faith of the Romanists; but MORE with his relics was then dealing in a damaged commodity. Lord Herbert has noticed the great fall of the price of relics at the dissolution of the monasteries: some which had been left in pawn no one cared to redeem.

"The History of King Richard the Third," which first appeared in a correct state in this folio, has given rise to "historic doubts" which led to some paradoxes. The personal monster whom MORE and SHAKSPEARE exhibited has vanished; but the deformity of the revolting parricide was surely revealed in the bones of the infant nephews. This, the earliest history in our vernacular literature, may still be read with delight. As a composition, the critical justice of Lord Orford may be cited: "Its author was then in the vigor of his fancy, and fresh from the study of the Greek and Roman historians, whose manner he has imitated." The details in this history of a prince of the house of York, though they may be tinged with the gall of the Lancastrian Cardinal Morton, descend to us with the weight of contemporary authority. It is supposed that MORE may have derived much of the materials of his history from his early patron: but the charms which still may retain us are the natural yet dramatic dialogue; the picturesque touches; and a style, at times, whose beauty three centuries have not wrinkled; and the emotions which such vital pages leave in the reader's mind.†

The "UTOPIA" of Sir THOMAS MORE, which, being composed in Latin, is not included in this great volume of his

* "Works of Sir Thomas More," 113, col. 2.

† Mr. Singer has furnished us with a correct reprint of this history. More's "Life of Richard the Third" had been given by our chroniclers from copies mutilated or altered. A work whose merits arise from the beauty of its composition admits of neither.

"Workes," may be read by the English reader in its contemporary spirited translation,* and more intelligibly in Bishop Burnet's version. The title of his own coinage has become even proverbial; and, from its classical Latinity, it was better known among foreigners even in Burnet's day than at home. This combination of philosophy, politics, and fiction, though borrowed from the ideal republic of Plato, is worthy of an experienced statesman and a philosopher who at that moment was writing not only above his age, but, as it afterwards appeared, above himself. It has served as the model of that novel class of literature, — political romances. But, though the "Utopia" is altogether imaginary, it displays no graces of the imagination in an ingeniously constructed fable. It is the dream of a good citizen; and, like a dream, the scenes, scattered and unconnected, are broken into by chimerical forms and impracticable achievements. In times of political empiricism, it may be long meditated; and the "Utopia" may yet pass through a million of editions before that new era of the perfectability of the human animal, the millennium of political theorists, which it would seem to have anticipated.

This famous work was written at no immature period of life; for MORE was then thirty-six years of age. The author had clear notions of the imperfections of governments; but he was not as successful in proposing remedies for the disorders he had detected. A community where all the property belongs to the government, and to which every man contributes by his labor, that he may have his own wants supplied; a domestic society which very much resembles a great public school, and converts a citizen, through all the gradations of

* The old translation, "by Raphe Robinson, 1551," has been republished by Dr. Dibdin, accompanied by copious annotations. Almost every thing relating to the family, the life, and the works of the author, may be found in "the biographical and literary introduction." It is the first specimen of an edition where the diligence of the editor has not been wasted on trivial researches or nugatory commentaries.

his existence, from form to form; and where every man, like an automatical machine, must be fixed in his proper place, — supposes a society of passionless beings which social life has never shown, and surely never can. The art of carrying on war without combating, by the wiliness of stratagems; or procuring a peace by offering a reward for the assassination of the leaders of the enemy, with whom, rather than with the people, all wars originate; the injunction, to the incurable, of suicide; the paucity of laws which enabled every man to plead his own cause; the utmost freedom granted to religious sects, where every man who contested the religion of another was sent into exile, or condemned to bondage; the contempt of the precious metal, which was here used but as toys for children, or as fetters for slaves, — such fanciful notions, running counter to the experience of history or to the advantages of civilized society, induced some to suspect the whole to be but the incoherent dreams of an idling philosopher, thrown down at random without much consideration. It is sobriety indulging an inebriation, and good sense wandering in a delirium. Burnet, in his translation, cautiously reminds his readers, that he must in no wise be made responsible for the matter of the work which "he ventured" to translate. Others have conceived the "Utopia" dangerous for those speculators in politics who might imagine the author to have been serious. More himself has adjudged the book "no better worthy than to lye always in his own island, or else to be consecrated to Vulcan."

But assuredly many of the extraordinary principles inculcated in the "Utopia" were not so lightly held by its illustrious author. The sincerity of his notions may be traced in his own simple habits, his opinions in conversation, and the tenor of his invariable life. His contempt of outward forms and personal honors, his voluntary poverty, his fearlessness of death, — all these afford ample evidence that the singularity of the man himself was as remarkable as the work he pro-

duced. The virtues he had expatiated on he had contemplated in his own breast.

This singular but great man was a sage whose wisdom lay concealed in his pleasantry; a politician without ambition; a lord-chancellor who entered into office poor, and left it not richer. When his house was to be searched for treasure, — which circumstance had alarmed his friends, — well did that smile become him when he observed, that "it would be only a sport to his family;" and he pleasantly added, "lest they should find out my wife's gay girdle and her gold beads." When the clergy, in convention, had voted a donation amounting to no inconsiderable fortune, "not for services to be performed, but for those which he had chosen to do," More rejected the gift with this noble confession: "I am both over-proud, and over-slothful also, to be hired for money to take half the labor and business in writing that I have taken since I began." And when accused by Tyndale and others for being "the proctor of the clergy," and richly fed, how forcible was his expression! — "He had written his controversial works only that God might give him thanks."

It happened, however, that his after-conduct in life, in regard to that religious toleration which he had wisely maintained in his ideal society, was as opposite as night to noon. Could he, then, have ever been earnest in his "Utopia"? — he who exults over the burning of a heretic; who "could not agree, that, before the day of doom, there were either any saint in heaven, or soul in purgatory, or in hell either;" for which horrible heresy he was delivered at last into the secular hands, and "burned as there was never wretch I ween better worth." * This harmless and hapless metaphysical theologian did not disagree with More on the existence of saints, of souls, nor of hell. The heretic conceived — and could he change by volition the ideas which seemed to him just? —

* "Sir Thomas More's Workes," 348.

that no reward or punishment could be inflicted before the final judgment. A conversation of five minutes might have settled the difference; for they only varied about the precise time!

In that great revolution which was just opening in his latter days, MORE seems sometimes to have mistaken theology for politics. A strange and mysterious change, such as the history of man can hardly parallel, occurred in the mind of MORE, by what insensible gradations is a secret which must lie in his grave.

This great man laid his head on the block to seal his conscience with his blood. Protestants have lamented this act as his weakness: the Romanists decreed a martyrdom. In a sudden change of system in the affairs of a nation, when even justice may assume the appearance of violence, the most enlightened minds, standing amidst their ancient opinions and their cherished prejudices subverted, display how the principle of integrity predominates over that of self-preservation.

THE EARL OF SURREY AND SIR THOMAS WYATT.

NOT many years intervened between the uncouth gorgeousness of HAWES, the homely sense of BARCLAY, the anomalous genius of SKELTON, and the pure poetry of Henry Howard, the EARL of SURREY. In the poems of SURREY, and his friend, Sir Thomas Wyatt,* the elder, the age of taste, if not of genius, opens on us. Dryden and Pope sometimes seem to appear two centuries before their date. There is no chronology in the productions of real genius; for, whenever a great master appears, he advances his art to a period which labor, without creation, toils for centuries to reach.

The great reformer of our poetry, he who first from his own mind, without a model, displayed its permanent principles, was the poetic Earl of Surrey. There was inspiration in his system, and he freed his genius from the barbaric taste or the undisturbed dulness which had prevailed since the days of Chaucer. His ear was musical; and he formed a metrical structure with the melodies of our varied versification, rejecting the rude rhythmical rhyme which had hitherto prevailed in our poetry. He created a poetic diction, and graceful involutions: a finer selection of words, and a delicacy of expression, were now substituted for vague diffusion and homeliness of phrases and feeble rhymes; or, on the other hand, for

* "The Works of the Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt," by Dr. Nott, form an important accession to our national literature. If we cannot always agree with the conclusions of our literary antiquary, we must value the variety of his researches, not less profound than extensive.

"Ingenuously to confess the truth, that face is formed for the expression of mirth rather than of gravity or dignity." But, lest he should derange the gravity of the German to whom he was writing, Erasmus cautiously qualifies the disparaging delineation, — "though as far as possible removed from folly or buffoonery." More, however, would assume a solemn countenance when on the point of throwing out some facetious stroke. He has so described himself when an interlocutor in one of his dialogues addresses him: "You use to look so sadly when you mean merrily, that many times men doubt whether you speak in sport when you mean good earnest."*

The unaffected playfulness of the mind; the smile whose sweetness allayed the causticity of the tongue; the tingling pleasantry when pointed at persons; the pungent raillery which corrected opinions without scorn or contumely; and the art of promptly amusing the mind of another by stealing it away from a present object, — appeared not only in his conversations, but was carried into his writings.

The grave and sullen pages of the polemical labors of More, whose writings chiefly turn on the controversies of the Romanists and the Reformers, are perhaps the only controversial ones which exhibit in the marginal notes, frequently repeated, "a merrie tale." "A merry tale cometh never amiss to me," said More truly of himself. He has offered an apology for introducing this anomalous style into these controversial works. He conceived, that, as a layman, it better became him "to tell his mind merrily than more solemnly to preach." Jests, he acknowledges, are but sauce; and "it were but an absurd banquet, indeed, in which there were few dishes of meat, and much variety of sauces; but that is but an unpleasant one where there were no sauce at all."

The massive folio of Sir Thomas More's "English

* "Sir Thomas More's Workes," 127.

Works" * remains a monument of our language at a period of its pristine vigor. Viewed in active as well as in contemplative life, at the bar or on the beach, as ambassador or chancellor, and not to less advantage, where, "a good distance from his house at Chelsea, he builded the new building, wherein was a chapel, a library, and a gallery," the character, the events, and the writings of this illustrious man may ever interest us.

These works were the fertile produce of "those spare hours for writing, stolen from his meat and sleep." We are told, that, "by using much writing, towards his latter end he complained of the ache of his breast." He has himself acknowledged, that "those delicate dainty folk, the evangelical brethren" (so More calls our early reformers), "think my works too long; for every thing that is, they think too long." More alludes to the rising disposition in men for curtailing all forms and other ceremonial acts, especially in the church service.

More, however skilful as a Latin scholar, to promulgate his opinions aimed at popularity, and cultivated our vernacular idiom, till the English language seems to have enlarged the compass of its expression under the free and copious vein of the writer. It is only by the infecility of the subjects which constitute the greater portion of this mighty volume, that its author has missed the immortality which his genius had else secured.

More has been fortunate in the zeal of his biographers; but we are conscious, that, had there been a Xenophon or a Boswell among them, they could have told us much more. The conversations of Sir Thomas More were racy. His was that rare gift of nature, perfect presence of mind, deprived of which the fullest is but slow and late. His

* "The Workes of Sir Thomas More in the English Tongue, 1557, fo.," a venerable folio of nearly 1500 pages in double columns, is closely printed in black-letter.

conversancy with public affairs, combined with a close observation of familiar life, ever afforded him a striking aptitude of illustration; but the levity of his wit, and the luxuriance of his humor, could not hide the deep sense which at all times gave weight to his thoughts, and decision to his acts. Of all these we are furnished with ample evidence.

Domestic affection in all its *naïve* simplicity dictated the artless record of Roper, the companion of More, for sixteen years, and the husband of his adored daughter Margaret.* The pride of ancestry in the pages of his great-grandson, the ascetic Cresacre More, could not borrow the charm of that work whence he derived his enlarged narrative.† More than one beadsman, the votaries of their martyr, have consecrated his memory even with their legendary faith;‡ while recent and more philosophical writers have expatiated on the wide theme, and have repeated the story of this great Chancellor of England.§

"The child here waiting at table, whomever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous man." It was thus that the

* Roper's "Life of Sir Thomas More," which had been suppressed through the reign of Elizabeth, only first appeared in 1626, at Paris, when a Roman-Catholic princess in the person of Henrietta, the queen of Charles the First, had ascended the throne of England: it was republished in 1729. There is also an elegant modern reprint by Mr. Singer.

† The Life by his great-grandson was printed in 1627, and republished in 1726. This biography is the one usually referred to. Though with a more lucid arrangement and a fuller narrative than Roper's Life, the writer inherited little of the family genius, except the bigotry of his great ancestor.

‡ *Tres Thomæ.* The three Thomases are Aquinas, à Becket, and More, by Dr. Thomas Stapleton. Another Life by J. H. is an abridgment, 1662. These writers, Romanists, as well as the great-grandson, have interspersed in their narrative more than one of those fabulous incidents and pious frauds, visions and miracles, which have been the opprobrium of Catholic biographers.

§ Macdiarmid, in his "Lives of British Statesmen," has chiefly considered the political character of this lord-chancellor. Others have written Lives merely as accompaniments to the editions of some of his works.

early patron of More, Cardinal Morton, sagaciously contemplated on the precocity of More's boyhood. His prompt natural humor broke out at the Christmas revels, when the boy, suddenly slipping in among the players, acted an extempore part of his own invention. Yet this jocund humor, which never was to quit him to his last awful minute, at times indulged a solemnity of thought, as remarkable in a youth of eighteen. In the taste of that day, he invented an allegorical pageant. These pageants consisted of paintings on rolls of cloth, with inscriptions in verse, descriptive of the scenical objects. They formed a series of the occupations of childhood, manhood, the indolent liver, "a child again," and old age, thin and hoar, wise and discreet. The last scenes exhibited more original conceptions. The image of DEATH, where under his "misshapen feet" lay the sage old man: then came "the Lady FAME," boasting that she had survived death, and would preserve the old man's name "by the voice of the people." But FAME was followed by TIME, "the lord of every hour, the great destroyer both of sea and land," deriding simple "Fame;" for "who shall boast an eternal name before me?" Yet was there a more potent destroyer than TIME: Time itself was mortal! and the eighth pageant revealed the triumph of ETERNITY. The last exhibited the poet himself, meditating in his chair, — he "who had fed their eyes with these fictions and these figures." The allegory of Fame, Time, and Eternity, is a sublime creation of ideal personifications. The conception of these pageants reminds one of the allegorical "Trionfi" of Petrarch; but they are not borrowed from the Italian poet. They were, indeed, in the taste of the age, and such pageants were exhibited in the streets; but the present gorgeous invention, as well as the verses, were the fancies of the youthful More.

MORE in his youth was a true poet; but in his active life he soon deserted these shadows of the imagination.

A modern critic has regretted, that, notwithstanding the

zeal of his biographers, we would gladly have been better acquainted with MORE's political life, his parliamentary speeches, his judicial decrees, and his history as an ambassador and a courtier.

There is not, however, wanting the most striking evidence of MORE's admirable independence in all these characters. I fix on his parliamentary life.

As a burgess under Henry the Seventh, he effectually opposed a royal demand for money. When the king heard that "a beardless boy had disappointed all his purpose," the malice of royalty was wreaked on the devoted head of the judge his father, in a causeless quarrel and a heavy fine. When MORE was chosen the Speaker of the Commons, he addressed Henry the Eighth on the important subject of *freedom of debate*. There is a remarkable passage on the heat of discussion, and the diversity of men's faculties, which displays a nice discrimination in human nature: "Among so many wise men, neither is every one wise alike; nor, among so many alike well-witted, every man alike well-spoken; and it often happeneth, that likewise as much folly is uttered with painted, polished speeches, so many boisterous and rude in language see deep indeed, and give right substantial counsel. And since also in matters of great importance the mind is so often occupied in the matter, that a man rather studies what to say than how, by reason whereof the wisest man and best-spoken in a whole country fortuneth, while his mind is fervent in the matter, somewhat to speak in such wise as he would afterward wish to have been uttered otherwise; and yet no worse will had he when he spake it, than he had when he would gladly change it."

Once the potent cardinal, irritated at the free language of the Commons, to awe the House, came down in person amid the blazonry of all the insignia of his multiform state. To check his arrogance, it was debated whether the minister should be only admitted with a few lords. MORE suggested,

that, as WOLSEY had lately taxed the lightness of their tongues, "it would not be amiss to receive him in all his pomp, with his (silver) pillars, emblems of his ecclesiastical power, as a pillar of the church, his maces, his pole-axes, his crosses, his hat, and his great seal too, to the intent, that, if he find the like fault with us hereafter, we may the more boldly lay the blame on those his grace brings with him." The cardinal made a solemn oration; and, when he ceased, behold the whole house was struck by one unbroken and dead silence! The minister addressed several personally, — each man was a mute: discovering that he could not carry his point by his presence, he seemed to recollect that the custom of the House was to speak by the mouth of their Speaker; and WOLSEY turned to him. MORE, in all humility, explained the cause of the universal silence, by the amazement of the House at the presence of so noble a personage; "besides, that it was not agreeable to the liberty of the House to offer answers; that he himself could return no answer, except every one of the members could put into his head their several wits." The minister abruptly rose, and departed *re infectâ*. Shortly after, WOLSEY in his gallery at Whitehall told MORE, "Would to God you had been at Rome, Mr. More, when I made you Speaker!" — "So would I too!" replied MORE; and then immediately exclaimed, "I like this gallery much better than your gallery at Hampton Court;" and thus, talking of pictures, he broke off "the cardinal's displeasant talk."

This was a customary artifice with MORE. He withdrew the mind from disturbing thoughts by some sudden exclamation, or broke out into some facetious sally, which gave a new turn to the conversation. Of many, to give a single instance. On the day he resigned the chancellorship, he went after service to his wife's pew: there bowing, in the manner and with the very words the lord-chancellor's servant was accustomed to announce to her, that "My lord was gone!" she

laughed at the idling mockery; but when assured, in sober sadness, that "My lord was gone!" this good sort of lady, with her silly exclamation of "Tilly-valley, tilly-valley!—will you sit and make goslings in the ashes?" broke out into one of those domestic explosions to which she was very liable, The resigned chancellor, now resigned in more than one sense, to allay the storm he had raised, desired his daughters to observe whether they could not see some fault in their mother's dress. They could discover none. "Don't you perceive that your mother's nose stands somewhat awry?" Thus, by a stroke of merriment, he dissipated the tedious remonstrances and perplexing inquiries which a graver man could not have eluded.

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More seems to have descried the speck of the Reformation, while others could not view even the gathering cloud in the political horizon. He and Roper were conversing on their "Catholic prince, their learned clergy, their sound nobility, their obedient subjects, and finally that no heretic dare show his face." More went even beyond Roper in his commendation; but he proceeded, "And yet, son Roper, I

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The impending Reformation was hastened by a famous invective in the form of "the Supplication of Beggars." Its flagrant argument lay in its arithmetic. It calculated all the possessions of the clergy, who, though but "the four hundredth part of the nation, yet held half of the revenues."

More replied to "the Supplication of the Beggars" by "the Supplications of the Souls in Purgatory." These he represented in terror at the sacrilegious annihilation of the masses said for their repose; and this, with the Romanist, was probably no weak argument in that day.

More more reasonably ridicules the extravagance of the estimates. Such accounts, got up in haste and designed for a particular purpose, are necessarily inaccurate; but the inaccuracy of a statement does not at all injure the drift of the argument, should that be based on truth.

With More "the heretics" were but ordinary rebels, as appears by the style of his narrative. "A rabble of heretics at Abingdon did not intend to lose any more labor by putting up bills (petitions) to Parliament, but to make an open insurrection and subvert all the realm, to kill the clergy, and sell priests' heads as good and cheap as sheep's heads, — three for a penny, buy who would! But God saved the church and the realm. Yet after this was there one John Goose roasted at Tower Hill; and thereupon some other John Goose began to make some gaggling awhile, but it availed him not. And now we have this gosling with his 'Supplication of Beggars.' He maketh his bill in the name of the beggars. The bill is couched as full of *lies* as the beggar swarmeth full of *lice*. We neither will nor shall need to make much business about

this matter: we trust much better in the goodness of good men."

The marriage of the clergy was no doubt at first abused by some. MORE describes one Richard Mayfield, late a monk and a priest, and, it may be added, a martyr; for he was burned. Of this man he says, "His holy life well declares his heresies, when, being both a priest and a monk, he went about two wives, one in Brabant, another in England. What he meant I cannot make you sure, whether he would be sure of the one if t'other should happen to refuse him; or that he would have them both, the one here, the other there; or else both in one place, the one because he was priest, the other because he was monk."*

Such is the ludicrous ribaldry which runs through the polemical works of Sir THOMAS MORE: the opposite party set no better example, and none worse than the redoubtable Simon Fish, the writer of the "Supplication of Beggars." Oldmixon expresses his astonishment that "the famous Sir Thomas More was so hurried by his zeal, that he forgot he was a gentleman, and treated Mr. Fish with the language of a monk."

Writers who decide on other men and on other times by the spirit of their own try human affairs by a false standard. MORE was at heart a monk. He wore a prickly hair-shirt to mortify the flesh; he scourged himself with the knotted cord; he practised the penance; and he appeals to miraculous relics as the evidences of his faith! I give his own words in alluding to the Sudarium, — that napkin sent to King Abgarus, on which Jesus impressed the image of his own face: "And it hath been by like miracle in the thin corruptible cloth kept and preserved these 1500 years fresh and well preserved, to the inward comforts, spiritual rejoicing, and great increase of fervor, in the hearts of good Christian people." To this he

* Works, fol. 346.

joins another similar miraculous relic, "the Evangelist Luke's portrait of our blessed Lady, his mother."*

Such were considered as the evidences of the true faith of the Romanists; but MORE with his relics was then dealing in a damaged commodity. Lord Herbert has noticed the great fall of the price of relics at the dissolution of the monasteries: some which had been left in pawn no one cared to redeem.

"The History of King Richard the Third," which first appeared in a correct state in this folio, has given rise to "historic doubts" which led to some paradoxes. The personal monster whom MORE and SHAKSPEARE exhibited has vanished; but the deformity of the revolting parricide was surely revealed in the bones of the infant nephews. This, the earliest history in our vernacular literature, may still be read with delight. As a composition, the critical justice of Lord Orford may be cited: "Its author was then in the vigor of his fancy, and fresh from the study of the Greek and Roman historians, whose manner he has imitated." The details in this history of a prince of the house of York, though they may be tinged with the gall of the Lancastrian Cardinal Morton, descend to us with the weight of contemporary authority. It is supposed that MORE may have derived much of the materials of his history from his early patron: but the charms which still may retain us are the natural yet dramatic dialogue; the picturesque touches; and a style, at times, whose beauty three centuries have not wrinkled; and the emotions which such vital pages leave in the reader's mind.†

The "UTOPIA" of Sir THOMAS MORE, which, being composed in Latin, is not included in this great volume of his

* "Works of Sir Thomas More," 113, col. 2.

† Mr. Singer has furnished us with a correct reprint of this history. More's "Life of Richard the Third" had been given by our chroniclers from copies mutilated or altered. A work whose merits arise from the beauty of its composition admits of neither.

"Workes," may be read by the English reader in its contemporary spirited translation,* and more intelligibly in Bishop Burnet's version. The title of his own coinage has become even proverbial; and, from its classical Latinity, it was better known among foreigners even in Burnet's day than at home. This combination of philosophy, politics, and fiction, though borrowed from the ideal republic of Plato, is worthy of an experienced statesman and a philosopher who at that moment was writing not only above his age, but, as it afterwards appeared, above himself. It has served as the model of that novel class of literature, — political romances. But, though the "Utopia" is altogether imaginary, it displays no graces of the imagination in an ingeniously constructed fable. It is the dream of a good citizen; and, like a dream, the scenes, scattered and unconnected, are broken into by chimerical forms and impracticable achievements. In times of political empiricism, it may be long meditated; and the "Utopia" may yet pass through a million of editions before that new era of the perfectability of the human animal, the millennium of political theorists, which it would seem to have anticipated.

This famous work was written at no immature period of life; for MORE was then thirty-six years of age. The author had clear notions of the imperfections of governments; but he was not as successful in proposing remedies for the disorders he had detected. A community where all the property belongs to the government, and to which every man contributes by his labor, that he may have his own wants supplied; a domestic society which very much resembles a great public school, and converts a citizen, through all the gradations of

* The old translation, "by Raphe Robinson, 1551," has been republished by Dr. Dibdin, accompanied by copious annotations. Almost every thing relating to the family, the life, and the works of the author, may be found in "the biographical and literary introduction." It is the first specimen of an edition where the diligence of the editor has not been wasted on trivial researches or nugatory commentaries.

his existence, from form to form: and where every man, like an automatical machine, must be fixed in his proper place,— supposes a society of passionless beings which social life has never shown, and surely never can. The art of carrying on war without combating, by the wiliness of stratagems; or procuring a peace by offering a reward for the assassination of the leaders of the enemy, with whom, rather than with the people, all wars originate: the injunction, to the incurable, of suicide: the paucity of laws which enabled every man to plead his own cause; the utmost freedom granted to religious sects, where every man who contested the religion of another was sent into exile, or condemned to bondage; the contempt of the precious metal, which was here used but as toys for children, or as fetters for slaves,—such fanciful notions, running counter to the experience of history or to the advantages of civilized society, induced some to suspect the whole to be but the incoherent dreams of an idling philosopher, thrown down at random without much consideration. It is sobriety indulging an inebriation, and good sense wandering in a delirium. Burnet, in his translation, cautiously reminds his readers, that he must in no wise be made responsible for the matter of the work which "he ventured" to translate. Others have conceived the "Utopia" dangerous for those speculators in politics who might imagine the author to have been serious. More himself has adjudged the book "no better worthy than to lye always in his own island, or else to be consecrated to Vulcan."

But assuredly many of the extraordinary principles inculcated in the "Utopia" were not so lightly held by its illustrious author. The sincerity of his notions may be traced in his own simple habits, his opinions in conversation, and the tenor of his invariable life. His contempt of outward forms and personal honors, his voluntary poverty, his fearlessness of death,—all these afford ample evidence that the singularity of the man himself was as remarkable as the work he pro-

duced. The virtues he had expatiated on he had contemplated in his own breast.

This singular but great man was a sage whose wisdom lay concealed in his pleasantry; a politician without ambition; a lord-chancellor who entered into office poor, and left it not richer. When his house was to be searched for treasure, — which circumstance had alarmed his friends, — well did that smile become him when he observed, that "it would be only a sport to his family;" and he pleasantly added, "lest they should find out my wife's gay girdle and her gold beads." When the clergy, in convention, had voted a donation amounting to no inconsiderable fortune, "not for services to be performed, but for those which he had chosen to do," More rejected the gift with this noble confession: "I am both over-proud, and over-slothful also, to be hired for money to take half the labor and business in writing that I have taken since I began." And when accused by Tyndale and others for being "the proctor of the clergy," and richly fed, how forcible was his expression! — "He had written his controversial works only that God might give him thanks."

It happened, however, that his after-conduct in life, in regard to that religious toleration which he had wisely maintained in his ideal society, was as opposite as night to noon. Could he, then, have ever been earnest in his "Utopia"? — he who exults over the burning of a heretic; who "could not agree, that, before the day of doom, there were either any saint in heaven, or soul in purgatory, or in hell either;" for which horrible heresy he was delivered at last into the secular hands, and "burned as there was never wretch I ween better worth."* This harmless and hapless metaphysical theologian did not disagree with More on the existence of saints, of souls, nor of hell. The heretic conceived — and could he change by volition the ideas which seemed to him just? —

* "Sir Thomas More's Workes," 348.

that no reward or punishment could be inflicted before the final judgment. A conversation of five minutes might have settled the difference; for they only varied about the precise time!

In that great revolution which was just opening in his latter days, More seems sometimes to have mistaken theology for politics. A strange and mysterious change, such as the history of man can hardly parallel, occurred in the mind of More, by what insensible gradations is a secret which must lie in his grave.

This great man laid his head on the block to seal his conscience with his blood. Protestants have lamented this act as his weakness: the Romanists decreed a martyrdom. In a sudden change of system in the affairs of a nation, when even justice may assume the appearance of violence, the most enlightened minds, standing amidst their ancient opinions and their cherished prejudices subverted, display how the principle of integrity predominates over that of self-preservation.

THE EARL OF SURREY AND SIR THOMAS WYATT.

NOT many years intervened between the uncouth gorgeousness of HAWES, the homely sense of BARCLAY, the anomalous genius of SKELTON, and the pure poetry of Henry Howard, the EARL of SURREY. In the poems of SURREY, and his friend, Sir Thomas Wyatt,* the elder, the age of taste, if not of genius, opens on us. Dryden and Pope sometimes seem to appear two centuries before their date. There is no chronology in the productions of real genius; for, whenever a great master appears, he advances his art to a period which labor, without creation, toils for centuries to reach.

The great reformer of our poetry, he who first from his own mind, without a model, displayed its permanent principles, was the poetic Earl of Surrey. There was inspiration in his system, and he freed his genius from the barbaric taste or the undisturbed dulness which had prevailed since the days of Chaucer. His ear was musical; and he formed a metrical structure with the melodies of our varied versification, rejecting the rude rhythmical rhyme which had hitherto prevailed in our poetry. He created a poetic diction, and graceful involutions: a finer selection of words, and a delicacy of expression, were now substituted for vague diffusion and homeliness of phrases and feeble rhymes; or, on the other hand, for

* "The Works of the Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt," by Dr. Nott, form an important accession to our national literature. If we cannot always agree with the conclusions of our literary antiquary, we must value the variety of his researches, not less profound than extensive.

that vitiated style of crude pedantic Latinisms, such as "purpúre, aureáte, pulchritúde, celatúre, facúnde," and so many others laborious nothings, filling the verse with noise. The contemplative and tender SURREY charms by opening some picturesque scene, or dwelling on some impressive incident. He had discerned the error of those inartificial writers, whose minute puerility, in their sterile abundance, detailed till nothing was remembered, and described till nothing was perceptible. Hitherto our poets had narrowed their powers by moulding their conceptions by temporary tastes, the manners and modes of thinking of their day; but their remoteness, which may delight the antiquary, diminishes their interest with the poetical reader. SURREY struck into that secret path which leads to general nature, guided by his art: his tenderness and his thoughtful musings find an echo in our bosoms, and are as fresh with us as they were in the court of Windsor three centuries past.

These rare qualities in a poet at such a period would of themselves form an era in our literature; but SURREY also extended their limits. The disciple of Chaucer was also the pupil of Petrarch; and the Earl of SURREY composed the *first sonnets* in the English language, with the amatory tenderness and the condensed style of its legitimate structure. Dr. Nott further claims the honor for Surrey of the invention of heroic blank verse; Surrey's version of Virgil being unrhymed.

When Warton suggested that Surrey borrowed the idea of blank verse from Trissino's "Italia Liberata," he seems to have been misled by the inaccurate date of 1528, which he affixed to the publication of that epic. Trissino's epic did not appear till 1547,* and Surrey perished in the January of that year. It was indeed long a common opinion, that Trissino invented the *versi sciolti*, or blank verse; though Quadrio

* "Tiraboschi," vol. vii. — Haym's "Bibliotheca Italiani." When Conybeare communicated the same information to Dr. Bliss, it must have been derived from Warton.

confesses that such had been used by preceding poets, whose names he has recorded. The mellifluence and flexibility of the vowelly language were favorable to unrhymed verse; while the poverty of the poetic diction, and the unmusical verse of France, could never venture to show itself without the glitter of rhyme. The heroic blank verse, however, was an afterthought of Surrey: he first composed his unrhymed verse in the long Alexandrine, had afterwards felicitously changed it for the decasyllabic verse, but did not live to correct the whole of his version. Surrey could not, therefore, have designed the pauses and the cadences of blank verse in his first choice, nor will they be found in his last. Nor can it be conceded that blank verse was wholly unknown among us. Webbe, a critic long after, in the reign of Elizabeth, considers the author of "Pierce Ploughman" as "the first whom he had met with who observed the quantity of our verse, *without the curiosity of rhyme.*"

Dr. Nott, with editorial ardor, considers that the unfinished model of Surrey was the prototype of all subsequent blank verse, and was also the origin of its introduction into dramatic composition. A sweeping conclusion, when we consider the artificial structure of our blank verse from the days of Milton, who, not without truth, asserted that "he first gave the example of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming." This indeed has been denied to Milton by those who look to dates, and have no ear; and are apt to imagine that rhymeless lines, mere couplets, with ten well-counted syllables in each, must necessarily form blank verse. Dr. Nott, in quoting the eulogy of Ascham on this noble effort of Surrey "to bring our national poetry to perfection," has omitted to add what followed; namely, the censure of Surrey for not having rejected our heroic verse altogether, and substituted the hexameter of Virgil in English verse. It is therefore quite evident that Ascham had formed no conception of blank verse, no more

than had Surrey, such as it was to be formed by the ear of Milton and by some of his successors. All beginnings are obscure: something is borrowed from the past, and something is invented for the future, till it is vain to fix the gradations of invention which terminate in what at length becomes universally adopted.

Could the life, or what we have of late called the psychological history, of this poetic Earl of SURREY be now written, it would assuredly open a vivid display of fine genius, high passions, and romantic enthusiasm. Little is known, save a few public events; but the print of the footsteps shows their dimension. We trace the excellence, while we know but little of the person.

The youth of SURREY, and his life, hardly passed beyond that period, betrayed the buoyancy of a spirit vehement and quick, but rarely under guidance. Reckless truth, in all its openness and its sternness, was his habit, and glory was his passion; but in this restlessness of generous feelings his anger too easily blazed forth. He was haughty among his peers, and he did not even scorn to chastise an inferior. We are not surprised at discovering that one of so unreserved a temper should in that jealous reign more than once have suffered confinement. But the youthful hero who pursued to justice a relative and a court favorite for a blow, by which that relative had outraged Surrey's faithful companion; he who would eat flesh in Lent; he who issued one night to break the windows of the citizens, to remind them that they were a sinful race, however that might have been instigated by zeal for "the new religion,"—all such things betrayed his enthusiastic daring: but his deeds, to become splendid, depended on their direction. The lofty notions he attached to his descent; his proud shield quartering the arms of the Confessor, which the duke, his father, dared not show to a jealous monarch; his feats of arms at the barriers, and his military conduct in his campaigns,—

"Who saw Kelsal blaze,
Landrecy burnt, and battered Boulogne render;
At Montreuil's gate hopeless of a recure" (recovery),—

there, where that twin-spirit, his beloved associate, Clere, to save his wounded friend, had freely yielded his own life; his magnificence as a courtier, the companion of the princely Richmond; all "the joy and feast with a king's son;" his own record of the brilliant days and the soothing fancies of "proud Windsor;" "its large open courts;" "the gravelled ground for the foaming horse;" "the palm-play;" "the stately seats and dances;" "the secret groves;" and "the wild forest, with cry of hounds;" and, more than all, the mysterious passion for "the fair Geraldine,"—cover the misty shade of Surrey with a cloud of glory, which, while it veils the man from our sight, seems to enlarge the object we gaze on.

We see this youth, he who first taught the English Muse accents she had never before tried, hurried from his literary seclusion, to be immolated on the scaffold, by the arts of a remorseless rival,—of him whose pride at last sent him to the block, and who signed the death-warrant of his own brother! It was at a moment when the dying monarch, as the breath was fleeting from his lips, once in his life was voiceless to condemn a state victim, that Somerset took up the stamp which Henry used, to affix it to the death-warrant of SURREY. Victim of his own domestic circle! The father disunited with the son, from fear or jealousy; the mother separated from the father, to the last vowing unforgiving vengeance; a sister disnatured of all kin, hastening to be the voluntary accuser of her father and her brother! These domestic hatreds were the evil spirits which raged in the house of the Howards, and hurried on the fate of the accomplished, the poetic, the hapless Earl of Surrey.

A tale of such grandeur and such woe passed away unheeded even by a slight record, so inexpert were the few

writers of those days, and probably so perilous was their curiosity. The pretended trial of Surrey, who, being no lord of Parliament, was tried by a timorous jury at Guildhall, seems to have been studiously suppressed; and the last solemn act of his life, "the leaving it," is alike concealed. Even in the registers of public events by our chroniclers, they unanimously pass over the glorious name and the miserable death, to spare the monarch's or the victim's honor.

The poems of SURREY were often read, as their multiplied editions show; but of the noble poet, and his Geraldine, tradition had not sent down even an imperfect tale. In this uncertainty, the world was disposed to listen to any romantic story of such genius and love and chivalry.

The secret history of SURREY was at length revealed, and the gravity of its discloser vouched for its authenticity Who would doubt the testimony of plain Anthony à Wood?

SURREY is represented hastening on a chivalric expedition to Italy: at Florence he challenges the universe, that his Geraldine was the peerless of the beautiful. In his travels, Cornelius Agrippa exhibited to Surrey, in a magical mirror, his fair mistress as she was occupied at the moment of inspection. He beheld her sick, weeping in bed, reading his poems, in all the grief of absence. This incident set spurs to his horse. At Florence he hastened to view the chamber which had witnessed the birth of so much beauty. At the court he affixed his challenge, and maintained this emprise in tilt and tourney. The Duke of Florence, flattered that a Florentine lady should be renowned by the prowess of an English nobleman, invited Surrey to a residence at his court; but our Amadis more nobly purposed to hold on his career through all the courts of Italy, shivering the lances of whoever would enter the lists, whether "Christian, Jew, or Saracen." Suddenly the Quixotism ends, by this paragon of chivalry being recalled home by the royal command.

This Italian adventure seemed congenial with the romantic

mystery in which the poet had involved the progress of his passion for his poetic mistress. He had himself let us into some secrets. Geraldine came from "Tuscany," — Florence was her ancient seat; her sire was an earl, her dame of "princes' blood;" "yet she was fostered by milk of an Irish breast;" and, from her tender years in Britain, "she tasted costly food with a king's child." The amatorial poet even designates the spots hallowed by his passion: he first saw her at Hunsdon, Windsor chased him from her sight, and at Hampton Court "first wished her for mine!"

These hints and these localities were sufficient to irritate the vague curiosity of Surrey's readers, and more particularly of our critical researchers, of whom Horace Walpole first ventured to explain the inexplicable. With singular good fortune, and from slight grounds, Walpole conjectured that Geraldine was no Italian dame, but Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, one of the daughters of the Earl of Kildare: the family were often called the Geraldines. The Italian descent from the Geraldi was made out by a spurious genealogy. The challenge and the tournament no one doubted. But some harder knots were to be untied; and our theoretical historian, unfurnished by facts and dates, it has been recently shown, discovered some things which never existed.

But every writer followed in the track. Warton compliments the sagacity of Walpole, and embroiders the narrative. The historian of our poetry not only details the incident of the magical mirror, but adds that "the imagination of Surrey was *heated anew* by this *interesting spectacle!*" He therefore had no doubt of the reality; and indeed, to confirm the whole adventure of the romantic chivalry, he refers the curious to a finely sculptured shield which is still preserved by the dukes of Norfolk. The Italian adventures of Surrey, and all that Walpole had erroneously suggested, are fully accepted; and our critic observes, "Surrey's life throws so much light on the character and the subjects of his poetry, that it is almost

impossible to consider the one without exhibiting the *few anecdotes* of the other." But the critical sagacity of Warton did not wholly desert him through all the circumstantial narrative; for suddenly his pen pauses, and he exclaims on these travels of Surrey, that "they have the air of a romance!"

And it was a romance; and it served for history many a year!* This tale of literary delusion may teach all future investigators into obscure points of history to probe them by dates.

It was long after the days of Walpole and Warton, and even of George Ellis, that it was discovered that these travels into Italy by Surrey had been transferred literally from an "Historical Romance." A great wit in Elizabeth's reign, Tom Nash, sent forth in "the Life of Jack Wilton, an unfortunate traveller," this whole legend of Surrey. The entire fiction of Nash annihilates itself by its extraordinary anachronisms.

In what respect Nash designed to palm the imposture of his "Historical Romance" on the world, may be left to be explained by some "Jack Wiltons" of our own. He says, "All that in this *phantastical treatise* I can promise is some *reasonable conveyance of history*, and variety of mirth." Must we trust to their conscience for "the reasonable conveyance"?

We now trace the whole progress of this literary delusion.

On Surrey's ideal passion, and on this passage misconceived, —

> "From Tuscan came my lady's worthy race;
> Fair Florence was sometime her ancient seat," —

the romancer inferred that Geraldine must be a fair Floren-

* And, strange to add, it is still history! Mr. Godwin, in "the Lives of Necromancers," details every part of this apocryphal tale! and the Edinburgh reviewer very philosophically, not doubtful of its verity, accounts for all its supernatural magic, and clearly explains the inexplicable!

tine: Surrey had alluded to the fanciful genealogy of the Geralds from the Geraldi. On this single hint, the romancer sends him on his aerial journey in this business of love and chivalry.

This romance, of which it is said only three copies are known, was published in 1594. Four years after, DRAYTON, looking about for subjects for his Ovidian Epistles, eagerly seized on a legend so favorable for poetry, and Geraldine and Surrey supplied two amatory epistles. Anthony à Wood, finding himself without materials to frame a life of the poetic Surrey, had recourse to "the famous poet," as he calls Drayton, whom he could quote; for Drayton was a consecrated bard for the antiquary, since Selden had commented on his great topographical poem. But honest Anthony on this occasion was not honest enough. He did not tell the world that he had fallen on the romance itself, Drayton's sole authority. Literally and silently our antiquary transcribed the fuller passages from a volume he was ashamed to notice, disingenuously dropping certain incidents which would not have honored the memory of Surrey. Thus the "phantastical" history for ever blots the authentic tomes of the grave *Athenæ Oxonienses*. A single moment of scrutiny would have detected the whole fabricated narrative; but there is a charm in romance which bewitched our luckless Anthony.

Thus it happened that the romancer, on a misconception, constructs an imaginary fabric; the poet Drayton builds on the romancer, the sober antiquary on both; then the commentators stand upon the antiquary. Never was a house of cards of so many stories. The foundation, Surrey's poetic passion, may be as fictitious as the rest; for the visionary Geraldine, viewed in Agrippa's magic mirror, was hardly a more mysterious shadow.

Not one of these writers was informed of what recent researches have demonstrated. They knew not that this Earl of Surrey in boyhood was betrothed to his lady, also a

child, — one of the customs to preserve wealth or power in great families of that day. These historians were unfurnished with any dates to guide them, and never suspected, that, when Surrey is made to set off on his travels in Italy after a Donna Giraldi who had no existence, he was the father of two sons, and "the fair Geraldine" was only *seven* years of age! that Surrey's first love broke out when she was *nine;* that he declared his passion when she was about *thirteen;* and, finally, that Geraldine, having attained to the womanly discretion of *fifteen*, dismissed the accomplished Earl of Surrey, with whom she never could be united, to accept the hand of old Sir Anthony Brown, aged sixty. Lady Brown disturbs the illusion of Geraldine in the modest triumph of sixteen over sixty.

Dr. Nott is in trepidation for the domestic morality of the noble poet; yet some of these amatory sonnets may have been addressed to his betrothed. He has perplexed himself by a formal protest against the perils of Platonic love, but apologizes for his hero in the manners of the age. It appears that not only the mistress of Petrarch, but those of Bayard the chevalier "sans reproche," and Sir Philip Sidney, were married women, with as crystalline reputations as their lovers. Nor should we omit the great friend of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt, who was a staid married man, notwithstanding his romantic passion for Anne Bullen. The courtly imitators of Petrarch had made love fashionable. It is evident that Surrey found nothing so absorbing in his passion, whatever it might be; for, whenever called into public employment, he ceased to be Petrarch, which Petrarch never could, and possibly for a want of occupation. A small quantity of passion, dexterously meted out, may be ample to inspire an amatorial poet. Neither Surrey nor Petrarch, accomplished lovers and poets, with all their mistress' coquetry and cruelty, broke their hearts in the tenderness of their ideas, or were consumed by "the perpetual fires" of their imagination.

We have now traced the literary delusion which long veiled the personal history of the Earl of Surrey, and which has duped so many ingenious commentators. The tale affords an additional evidence of that "confusion worse confounded" by truth and fiction, where the names are real, and the incidents fictitious; a fatality which must always accompany "Historical Romances." The same mischance occurred to "the Cavalier" of De Foe, often published under different titles, suitable to the designs of the editors, and which tale has been repeatedly mistaken for an authentic history written at the time. Under the assumed designation by "a Shropshire Gentleman," whole passages have been transferred from the romance into the authentic history of Nichols's Leicestershire, just as Anthony à Wood had felicitously succeeded in his historical authority of Tom Nash's "Life of Jack Wilton."

In the story of Surrey and Wyatt, one circumstance is too precious to be passed over. Wyatt commenced as a writer nearly ten years before Surrey, and his earlier poetic compositions are formed in the old rhythmical school. His manuscripts, which still exist, bear his own strong marks in every line to regulate their cæsura; for our ancient poets, to satisfy the ear, were forced to depend on such artificial contrivances. It was in the strict intercourse of their literary friendship that the elder bard surrendered up the ancient barbarism, and, by the revelation of his younger friend, studied an art which he had not himself discovered. Wyatt is an abundant writer; but he has wrought his later versification with great variety, though he has not always smoothed his workmanship with his nail. For many years, Wyatt had smothered his native talent by translation from Spanish and Italian poets, and in his rusty rhythmical measures. He lived to feel the truth of nature, and to practise happier art. Of his amatory poems, many are graceful, most ingenious. The immortal one to his "Lute," the usual musical instrument of the lover or the poet, as the guitar in Spain, com-

posed with as much happiness as care, is the universal theme of every critic of English poetry.

His defrauded or romantic passion for Anne Bullen often lends to his effusions a deep mysterious interest, when we recollect that the poet alludes to a rival, who must have made him tremble as he wrote.

> "Who list to hunt? I know where is an hind!
> But as for me, alas! I may no more,
> The vain travail hath wearied me so sore:
> I am of them that furthest come behind.
> Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
> As well as I may spend his time in vain:
> Graven with diamonds, in letters plain,
> There is written, her fair neck round about,—
> "Noli me tangere; for Cæsar's I am,
> *And wild to hold, though I seem tame.*"

We perceive Wyatt's keen perception of character in the last verse, admirably expressive of the playfulness and levity of the thoughtless but susceptible Anne Bullen, which never left her when in the Tower or on the scaffold. The poems of WYATT accompanied the unhappy queen in her imprisonment; and it was Wyatt's sister who received her prayer-book with her last smile, for the block before her could not disturb the tenderness of her affections.

WYATT is an ethical poet, more pregnant with reflection than imagination: he was intimately conversant with the world; and it is to be regretted that our poet has only left three satires, the first Horatian Epistles we possess. These are replete with the urbanity and delicate irony of the Roman, but, what was then still unexampled, flowing with the fulness and freedom of the versification of Dryden. Wyatt had much salt, but no gall.

WYATT excelled SURREY in his practical knowledge of mankind: he had been a sojourner in politic Madrid, and had been employed on active embassies. Surrey could only give the history of his own emotions, affections, and habits: he is

the more interesting poet for us; but we admire a great man in Wyatt, one whose perception was not less subtile and acute because it spread on a far wider surface of life.

Wiat, for so he wrote his name, was a great wit; as, according to the taste of his day, his anagram fully maintained. We are told that he was a nice observer of times, persons, and circumstances; knowing when to speak, and, we may add, how to speak. That happened to Wyatt which can be recorded probably of no other wit: three prompt strokes of pleasantry thrown out by him produced three great revolutions, — the fall of Wolsey, the seizure of the monastic lands, and the emancipation of England from the papal supremacy. The Wyatts, besides their connection with Anne Bullen, had all along been hostile to the great cardinal. One day, Wyatt, entering the king's closet, found his majesty much disturbed, and displeased with the minister. Ever quick to his purpose, Wyatt, who always told a story well, now, to put his majesty into good humor, and to keep the cardinal down in as bad a one, furnished a ludicrous tale of "the curs baiting a butcher's dog." The application was obvious to the butcher's son of Ipswich; and we are told, for the subject but not the tale itself has been indicated, that the whole plan of getting rid of a falling minister was laid down by this address of the wit. It was with the same dexterity, when Wyatt found the king in a passion on the delay of his divorce, that with a statesmanlike sympathy, appealing to the presumed tendency of the royal conscience, he exclaimed, "Lord! that a man cannot repent him of his sin but by the pope's leave!" The hint was dropped: the egg of the Reformation was laid, and soon it was hatched! When Henry the Eighth paused at the blow levelled at the whole ponderous machinery of the papal clergy, dreading from such wealth and power a revolution, besides the ungraciousness of the intolerable transfer of all abbey lands to the royal domains, Wyatt had his repartee for his counsel: "Butter the rooks' nests!" — that is,

divide all these houses and lands with the nobility and gentry.

Wyatt should have been the minister of Henry: we should then have learned if a great wit, where wit was ever relished, could have saved himself under a monarch who dashed down a Wolsey.

Surrey and Wyatt, though often engaged, the one as a statesman, the other as a general, found their most delightful avocation in the intercourse of their studies. Their minds seemed cast in the same mould. They mutually confided their last compositions, and sometimes chose the same subject in the amicable wrestlings of their genius. It was a community of studies and a community of skill: the thoughts of the one flowed into the thoughts of the other, and we frequently discover the verse from one in the poem of the other. Wyatt was the more fortunate man; for he did not live to see himself die in the partner of his fame perishing on a scaffold, and he has received a poet's immortality from that friend's noble epitaph. In his epitaph, Surrey dwells on every part of the person of his late companion, — he expatiates on the excellences of the head, the face, the hand, the tongue, the eye, and the heart: but these are not fanciful conceits; the solemnity of his thoughts and his deep emotions tell their truth. Wyatt's was —

> "A head where Wisdom's mysteries did frame;
> Whose hammers beat still in that lively brain,
> As on a stithy,* where some work of fame
> Was daily wrought."

* The smith's forge.

THE SPOLIATION OF THE MONASTERIES.

INCIDENTS of such an overwhelming nature in political history as are those of the Reformation can have no sudden origin. They are but the consequences of something which has preceded. In our country, the suppression of the monasteries and the abbeys had been long prepared: it was not, and it could not have been, the temporary passions nor the absolute will of an arbitrary monarch, which by a word could have annihilated an awful power, had not the royal edict been but the echo of many voices. It was attacking but an aged power dissolving in its own corruption, which, blind with pride, looked with complacency on its own unnatural greatness, its political anasarca. Its opulence was an object it could not conceal from its enviers, and its paramount eminence was too heavy a yoke for its rising rivals. This power, in the language of the times, had "covered the land with an Egyptian darkness;" and when appeared the "godly and learned king," as the eighth Henry was called, he was saluted as "a Moses who delivered them from the bondage of Pharaoh." It is not therefore strange that the act which at a single blow annihilated the monastic orders and their "lands and tenements" was hailed as the most patriotic which had been ever passed by an English sovereign. It made even a tyrannous and jealous monarch, who cut off more heads of men and women than any other on record, popular and extolled even in his latter days.

Henry the Eighth had paused at the blow he was about to level. The plunder was too monstrous even for the hand of

an arbitrary monarch. Its division among the nobility and gentry was an expedient which removed the odium from royalty, and invested it with that munificence which dazzled the pride of Henry. In the vast harvest, the king refused the lion's share; looking for his safer portion in the secure loyalty of the new possessors to whom he transferred this vast and novel wealth.

As the scheme was managed, therefore, it was a compromise or copartnership of the king and his courtiers. The lands now lie the open prey of the hardy claimant or the sly intriguer: crowds of suppliants wearied the crown to participate in that national spoliation. Every one hastened to urge some former service or some present necessity as a colorable plea for obtaining a grant of some of the suppressed lands. A strange custom was then introduced, — that of "begging for an estate." Kneeling to the king, and specifying some particular lands, was found a convenient method to acquire them; and these royal favors were sometimes capriciously and even ludicrously bestowed. Fuller has a pleasant tale concerning one Master Champernoun. One day, observing two or three gentlemen waiting at a door through which the king was to pass, he was inquisitive to learn their suit; which they refused to tell. On the king's appearance, they threw themselves on their knees; and Champernoun was prompt in joining them, with an implicit faith, says Fuller, that courtiers never ask any thing hurtful to themselves. They were begging for an estate. The king granted their petition. On this, Champernoun claimed his share of the largesse: they remonstrated that he had never come to beg with them. He appealed to the king; and his brother-beggars were fain to allot him the considerable Priory of St. Germains, which he sold to the ancestor of the present possessor, the Earl of St. Germains.

The king was prodigal in his grants; for, the more he multiplied the receivers of his bounties, the more numerous

would be the stanch defenders of their new possessions:* gratitude was the least of their merits. He counted on their resolution and their courage. The bait was relishing; and there were some, when land-grants became more scarce, whose voracity of reformation attempted to snatch at the lands of the universities, which had certainly gone had not Henry's love of literature protected their trembling colleges. We have his majesty's own words, in replying to the suggestion of some hungry courtier: "Ha! sirrah! I perceive the abbey-lands have fleshed you, and set your teeth on edge, to ask also those colleges. We pulled down sin by defacing the monasteries; but you desire to throw down all goodness by subversion of colleges. I tell you, sir, that I judge no land in England better bestowed than on our universities, which shall maintain our realm when we be dead and rotten. Follow no more this vein, but content yourselves with what you have already, or else seek honest means whereby to increase your worldhoods."

Lord Cromwell was the chief minister through whose mediation these novel royal grants of houses and lands were distributed. There was evidently no chance of attention from his lordship without the most open and explicit offers of the grossest bribery. The Chancellor Audley, in bargaining with Lord Cromwell for the Abbey of St. Osyth, for "some present trouble in this suit," one day sent twenty pounds, with "my poor hearty good-will, during my life." Perhaps the bribe, though only placed to account, had not its full weight,

* A fear of the restitution of these abbey-lands to their former uses appears to have prevailed long after their alienation. So late as in the reign of James the First, the founder of Dulwich College, in a dispute respecting the land, observes hypothetically, "If the State should be at any time pleased to returne all abbey-lands to their former use, I must lose Dulwich, for which I have paid now £5,000." At a later revolution, when the bishops' lands were seized on by the parliamentarians, many obtained those lands at easy rates, or at no rate at all: the greater part reverted; but, if I am not misinformed, there are still descendants of some of these parliamentarians who hold estates without title-deeds.

as the chancellor does not appear, in the present instance, to have possessed himself of this abbey, though afterwards, with the spoils of two rich monasteries, he built the most magnificent mansion in England, by which he perpetuated his own name in the once-famed Audley End. Sir Thomas Elyot, in soliciting his lordship's mediation with the king to reward him with "some convenient portion of the suppressed lands," found it advisable to offer a conditional promise. "Whatsoever portion of land that I shall attain by the king's grace, I promise to give to your lordship the first year's fruits, with my assured and faithful heart and service." All were offering their hearts and the rest of their lives to Lord Cromwell.

As for the regal dispenser himself, so stupendous was his portion, that it became necessary to found a court never heard of before, — "the Court of Augmentation;" an expressive designation, indicating its plenary character, with its chancellor and its treasurer, and a long routine of officers, and none too many, "that the king might be justly dealt with," says Cowell, "the interpreter," "for all the manors and parks, the colleges and chantries, and the religious houses which the king did not sell or give away;" that is, the selected prey which the royal eagle grasped in his own talons.

We are accustomed to trace the Reformation to Henry the Eighth: but, in verity, small are the claims of this sovereign on posterity; for, through all the multiplied ramifications of superstition, nothing under him was reformed. The other great event of the Reformation — the assumption of the spiritual supremacy — accorded with the national independence from a foreign jurisdiction. The policy was English; but it originated in the private passions of the monarch. Assuredly, had the tiara deigned to nod to the regal solicitor, then had "the Defender of the Faith" only given to the world another edition of his book against Luther.

In the last years of his reign, Henry vacillated in his uncertain reform. Sometimes leaning on one party, and

sometimes on another, he had lost the vigor of his better days. In his last parliament, though not without some difficulty, both from Protestant and Papist, they had voted for "the augmentation" of the royal revenue, their grant of the chantries. These chantries were the last wrecks of the monastic lands. A single church had often several chantries attached to it. Chantries were endowments of estates by the sinners of that age for the benefit of having eternal masses sung for their departed souls. Henry on this occasion, in his last speech, strongly animadverts on the national disunion; and among his thanks mingles his menaces "to unite them in a more unacceptable way" than the tenderness with which at that moment he addressed them, for their concessions to his "Court of Augmentation."

It is also evident, by this able and extraordinary speech, that Henry would gladly have revoked his gift to the people of "the Word of God in their mother-tongue," as his majesty expresses himself.* He had, indeed, already in part withdrawn the freedom he had granted by restricting it to a few persons, and only to be used on particular occasions. His majesty proceeds: "You lay too much stress on your own expositions and fantastical opinions. In such sublime matters you may easily mistake. This permission of reading the Bible is only designed for private information, not to furnish you with reprimanding phrases and expressions of reproach against priests and preachers. I am extremely sorry to find with how little reverence the Word of God is mentioned; how people squabble about the sense; how it is turned into wretched rhyme, sung and jingled in every ale-house and tavern." This part of the king's speech was pointed at the general readers of the Scriptures; but his majesty did not discover any happier union among the clergy themselves, whom he roundly rates: "I am every day informed that

* See an abstract from one of his proclamations in "Curiosities of Literature," vol. iv. p. 286. — Ed.

you of the clergy are declaiming against each other in the pulpit; and here your charity and discretion are quite lost in vehemence and satire. Some are too stiff in their old *mumpsimus*, and others too busy and curious in their new *sumpsimus*.* Thus the pulpits are, as it were, batteries against each other: the noise is hostile and ruinous. How can we expect the poor people should live friendly with their neighbors, when they have such unhappy precedents of discord and dissension in those that teach them?"

Henry the Eighth rejected the pope; but surely he died a Romanist. His unwieldy huge form was lifted up from his death-bed that he might prostrate himself, and in the writer's language, who, however, was a Papist, "bury himself in the earth," to testify his reverence for "the real presence," when it was brought before him. His will, which, though it was put aside, was not the less the king's will, attested his last supplications to "the Virgin Mary, and all her holy company of heaven;" and he endowed an altar at Windsor, "to be honorably kept up with all things necessary for *a daily mass*, there to be read *perpetually while the world shall endure.*" At the same time, Henry endowed the poor knights of Windsor, upon condition that they should repeat their eternal masses for his soul. His magnificence was proportionate to his sins; but his perpetual masses and the world did not endure together.

With this fact before us, it is not therefore strange that foreign historians should have declared that our Henry the Eighth never designed a Reformation; that he altered nothing; and had only raised a schism, which those who contest the papal sovereignty in their civil affairs, as the Gallican Church affected to do, would incline more to approve than to censure.

* This alludes to the well-known story of the old priest, who, having blunderingly used *mumpsimus* for *sumpsimus*, would never be put right, alleging that "he hated all novelties."



This monarch has been lauded as a patriot king for the suppression of the monasteries and the national emancipation from the tiara; but patriotism has often covered the most egotistical motives.

A CRISIS AND A RE-ACTION.

ROBERT CROWLEY.

THERE is a state of transition in society, which we usually call a crisis. A crisis is the most active moment of conflicting principles: the novel must extirpate the ancient, the ancient must eject the novel; the one looks to be continued, and the other to be settled. It is a painful state of obstinate resistance, like that of two wrestlers when neither can cast down the other.

Fortunate are the people who have only to pass through a single crisis. But, in the wrath of Providence, there may be reserved another connecting crisis in the chain of human events; and this we term a re-action, usually accompanied by a retaliation: then comes the hoarded vengeance and the day of retribution on which issues no amnesty. In physics, action and re-action are equal; the reciprocation of any impulse not being greater than the impulse itself. Nature in her operations thus preserves an equilibrium; but the human hatreds and the partial interests which man has contrived for his own misery can only find that equilibrium when he submits to a toleration. But a toleration is a partition of power, and predominance is the vitality of a party. The Catholic vengeance of Mary in its re-action was out of all proportion greater than the Protestant docility of Edward. Our nation has been more subject to this crisis and this re-action than perhaps any other. The reign of Charles the First was a crisis, that of Charles the Second a re-action; that of James the Second brought on a crisis, and the revolution of 1688

was the consequential re-action. But never have the people suffered more than during the three reigns of Edward the Sixth, Mary, and Elizabeth: a terrible intolerance disorganized the whole community, — the conflict of old and of new creeds, of reciprocal persecutions and alternate triumphs, of abjurations and recantations, of supple compliers and rabid polemics, and of pugilistic contests of the ejected with the the ejectors, — rapid scenes at once tragic and ludicrous.

Henry the Eighth died in 1547, and the accession of Elizabeth was in 1558. In this short period of eleven years we were governed by two sovereigns, whose reigns, happily for the English people, were the shortest in our annals.

A new era was opening under the dominion of Henry; for he was a monarch of enlarged views. But the intellectual character of England in its vernacular literature was retarded by the events which occurred in the reigns of the two successors of this sovereign. The nation indeed suffered no longer from the civil wars of the rival Roses; but another war now shook the empire with as merciless a rivalry: it was a universal conflict of opinions and dogmas. The governing powers themselves combated each other; and whether in opposing the Reformer to the Romanist, or in restoring "the papelin" to root out "the gospeller," in these two mutable reigns they neutralized or distracted the unhappy people; and, while both maintained that they were proffering "the true religion," religion itself seemed to have lost its eternal truth. Edward with an infirm hand established, what, from her short reign, Mary, with her barbarous energy, could only imperfectly cast down.

Edward the Sixth, a boy-king and a puppet-prince, invested with supreme power, acted without any volition of his own. We are prepossessed in his favor by his laborious diary. It is, however, remarkable that no solitary entry made in that book of life, no chance effusion, disturbs the uninterrupted equanimity. Whether the young king signs

for the decapitation of his two uncles, or jots down the burning of Joan of Kent, an Arian, and another of a Dutchman, a Socinian, or records how a live goose suspended had its head sliced off by those who run at the ring, they seem equally to be matters of course, and by him were only distinguished by their respective dates. A nation's hope has always been the flattering painter of every youthful prince who dies immaturely: in the royal youth is lamented the irreparable loss of the future great monarch. But his father had been the most glorious youthful prince who ever adorned a throne; and it would be hard to decide, by the heartless chronicle of Edward, whether such an imperturbable spirit would have closed his life as a Nero or a Titus. This unhappy young prince must have felt the utter misery of his condition; for his was that curse of power, when in its exercise power itself becomes powerless, while its hands must be directed by another's. Had the reign of Edward the Sixth been prolonged, we should have had a polemical monarch, if we may judge by a collection of texts of Scripture, in proof of the doctrine of justification by faith, which exists in his own handwriting, written in French, and dedicated to his uncle.*

This was a calamitous period for the nation: we derive little consolation when we discover, that, not more than three centuries ago, our ancestors were a semi-barbarous race. We seem to be consulting the annals of some Asiatic dynasty, when we see a royal nephew tranquilly affixing his signature to the death-warrants of his uncles: imprisonment or exile would have been too tender for these state victims. We see one brother attainted by another, and the scaffold finally receiving both; and a Queen of England, in the captivity of the Romish superstition, hailing with a benediction her own *autos da fè*. What we should have gained, had the accomplished prince lived, we cannot conjecture; but what the nation were spared by the death of the melancholy Mary, is not

* It will be found in the additional manuscripts at the British Museum.

doubtful. Edward and Mary were opposite bigots, and both alike presumed that they were appointed to the work of sanctity; but every reform which requires to be carried on by coercion will long appear ambiguous to the better tempered. The bigotry as well as the puerile taste of the prince appeared when he composed a comedy or interlude against *the Whore of Babylon*, and *the False Gods;* but the brawls of polemics, at least, are more tolerable than torture and the sacrifice of fire.

It was one of the first evils of the Reformation, that the people were ill prepared to receive their emancipation. All sense of subordination rapidly disappeared in society; even the spell of devotion was dissolved; and the people seemed to consider, that, having rid themselves of one spurious mode of religion, there was no longer any religion in the world. "Thus for religion ye keep no religion," wrote the learned Cheke, in once addressing an armed multitude, who cruelly would not tolerate the Christianity of their neighbors.

An immature reformation is accompanied by certain unavoidable inconveniences. Its first steps are incomprehensible to the thoughtless, and too vague for the considerate; doing what it should not do, and leaving undone what it ought to do; comprehending too much, and omitting many things. A revolutionary reform breaks out with an ebullition of popular feelings; but, in escaping from one tyranny, men do not necessarily enter into freedom. The reformer, in abandoning what is known, looks to an uncertain and distant futurity: the anti-reformer appeals to precedent, and clings to what is real; his good is positive, and his evil is not concealed. In the removal of some long-standing evils in civil society, some portion of good goes with them; for many of these served as expedients to supply certain wants, and therefore, relatively, were or may be beneficial. Even our old prejudices, when scrutinized, often will be found to have struck their roots in the common welfare. The complicate interests of civil society were at first a web woven by strong hands; so that much of

the antiquated may retain its soundness, while the gloss of the new may set off but a loose and flimsy texture. These are some of the difficulties of an age of innovation, which may wisely check without stopping the velocity of its movements. The only unerring reformer who partakes not of human infirmities, neither deceived by illusions nor overcome by prejudices, and whose only wisdom is experience, must be that silent and unceasing worker of the destinies of man, — Time!

At the period now before us, the crisis and the re-action were alike remarkable. The people who witnessed in four successive reigns four different systems of religion, mutable with the times, amidst their incertitude were in fact taught a religious scepticism. One of the great innovations in divine service was that of preaching from the pulpit, instead of reading set homilies or other prescribed lessons, by which the Romanists had reduced their whole devotion to a mumbled ritual and a mechanical service, — formularies and forms which ceased to operate on the heart, and carried on a religion that was not religious.

The introduction of *preaching* appears to have been followed by an unhappy effect. Latimer, in the rude simplicity of his style, complains of some that went to church for the benefit of being "lulled into a nap." There was a still greater grievance in this novel custom of preaching: for, from the pulpits, the turbulent were rousing the passions of the people by declaiming against what some termed "the abuses which ought to be put away;" while others, persevering in their old doctrine, were alarming their auditors for the loss of what had been put away. Pulpit thundered against pulpit; for it was not only the reformer, but the anti-reformer, who were the preachers. The fact was, that, by an avaricious policy, "the court of augmentation," which had to pension the monks of the suppressed houses, filled up the vacant benefices as fast as they occurred, by appointing these annuitants to curtail the pension-list. The enemy was thus settled in the camp of

the reformers. This spirit of division was caught by the rude stage of that day, in their comedies or interludes. This inundation of popular clamor was only to be stayed by coercion,—by proclamations, and orders in council. The Council of State issued their orders, or rather their instructions, how the preachers were to preach, and that none but the licensed should be permitted to ascend into the pulpit. Even Latimer himself was discountenanced for his apostolical freedoms by inveighing against the gentry, who sent their sons to college instead of educating them at home for the church. Academical degrees were abrogated as anti-Christian; Greek was heresy; and all human learning was to be vain and useless to "the gospellers." As the preachers were to be licensed, it came to the turn of the players and the printers not to enact or print their interludes without a special license from the privy council; and at length the interludes were actually inhibited for "containing matter relating to sedition;" and this proclamation more particularly specifies those that "play in English." The Romanists had their interludes as well as the Reformers. Bishop Percy once observed, that the excellence of the drama, as every wise man would have it, is to form a supplement to the pulpit,—this literally occurred in the present instance; but the pulpit was itself as disorderly, to use the words of the proclamation, "as any light and fantastical head could list to invent and devise." Our most skilful delver into dramatic history, amidst his curious masses of disinterments, has brought up this proclamation. We must connect the state of these rude players with these rude preachers: the interludes were nothing more than reflections from the sermons; player and preacher were the same. By connecting these together, we form a juster notion of their purpose than we find in the isolated fact. There was now sedition in religion as well as in politics.

The prevalent fervor scattered its sparks through all the ranks of society, and the thoughts of all were concentrated on

the sole object of "the new religion." The Reformation was the great political topic in the court of Edward the Sixth: discussions in theology were no longer confined to colleges or to the clergy. Our poets, ever creatures of their age, reflecting its temper, and who best tell its story, confined their genius to ballads and interludes, making rough sport for loungers and for the common people; or, in their quieter moods, were devoted to metrical versions from the Scriptures. In a history of our vernacular literature, the introduction of a versified psalter and of psalm-singing forms an incident; as the passion for psalmody itself is a portion of the history of the Reformation. "This infectious frenzy of sacred song," as Thomas Warton describes what he condemns as puritanic, we adopted from the practice of Calvin, who had introduced psalm-singing into the Geneva discipline, but really had himself borrowed it from the popularity of the first psalms in French metre, by Clement Marot. This natural and fine genius, as a commutation for an irregular life, — and he had been imprisoned for eating flesh in Lent, — was persuaded by the learned Vatable, the Hebrew professor, to perform this signal act of penance. The gay novelty charmed the court, and was equally delightful to the people: every one chose the psalm which expressed his own personal feelings or described his own condition, adapted to some favorite air for the instrument or the voice. At the time it could have been little suspected, that while Calvin was stripping the religious service of its pageantry, and denuding it even of its decent ceremonies, he would have condescended to any thing so human as a tune and a chorus: yet the austere reformer of Geneva showed no deficient knowledge of human nature when he contrived to make men sing in concert or carol in the streets, and shorten their work by a song cheerful or sad; for psalms there are for joy or for affliction, effusions for all hours, suitable to all ranks.*

* See an article on Psalms in vol. ii. of "Curiosities of Literature." —Ed.

Another incident in which our vernacular literature was remotely connected was the calling-in of the ancient rituals, missals, and other books of the Latin service, and establishing the Book of Common Prayer in the common language. But the people at large seemed reluctant to alter their antiquated customs, which habit had long endeared to them. While they had listened to an unintelligible Mass, they had, from their childhood, contracted a spirit of devotion. Their fathers had bowed to the Mass as a holy office from time immemorial; and from their childhood they had attached to it those emotions of holiness which were not the less so by their erroneous association of ideas. When their religion became a mere Act of Parliament, and their prayers were in plain English, all appeared an affair of yesterday. The church service seemed no longer venerable, the new priesthood no longer apostolical; and the giddy populace protested against the common dues exacted by their neighbor the curate for their marriages and baptisms and funerals. They forsook their churches, and even refused to pay tithes.

It is in revolutionary periods that we find men adapted for these rare occasions; who, had they not lived amid the commotions around them, had probably not emerged out of the sphere of their neighbors. Such minds quickly sympathize with popular grievances and popular clamors, and obtain their reformation, often at the sacrifice of their individual interest, as if the cause were their appointed vocation. They are advocates who plead, imbued even by all the prejudices of their clients; they are organs resounding the fulness of the passions around them: a character of this order is the true representative of the multitude; and we listen to all their cries in the single voice of such a man.

And such a man was Robert Crowley, a universal reformer through Church and State; whose unwearied industry run the pace of his zeal; whose declarations were as open as his designs were definite; and whose resolved spirit pursued

its object in every variable form which his imagination could invent, and which incessant toil never found irksome.

Crowley had been a student at Magdalen College at Oxford, and obtained a fellowship. At the close of the reign of Henry the Eighth, Crowley appears to have sojourned in "the great city;" and, in that of Edward the Sixth, we must not be surprised to discover the Fellow of Magdalen established as a printer and bookseller, and, moreover, combining the elevated characters of poet and preacher. How it happened that a man of letters, and not undistinguished by his genius, adopted a mechanical profession, we may account for from the exigencies of the time. Possibly Crowley's fellowship was what Swift once called "a beggarly fettleship." In the hurried reform of the day, "the universal good" was attended by "a great partial evil." In the dissolution of the abbeys and priories, they had also demolished those useful exhibitions proceeding from them, by which poor students were maintained at the universities. Many, thus deprived of the means of existence at college, were compelled to forsake their Alma Mater, and seek another course of life. It was probably this incident which had thrown this learned man among the people. How Crowley contrived to fulfil his fourfold office of printer, bookseller, poet, and preacher, with eminent success, the scanty notices of his life disappoint our curiosity. We would gladly enter into the recesses of this man's arduous life. Did he partition the hours of his day? What habits harmonized such clashing pursuits? Was he a sage whose wisdom none of his followers have gathered? Was the shop of the studious man haunted by learned customers? When we think of the printer's press and the bookseller's counter, we are disposed to inquire, Where mused the poet, and where stood the preacher?

Crowley is the author of many controversial pieces, and some satirical poems reflecting the manners and the passions of his day, all which enjoyed repeated editions. But he was

not less a favorite sermonizer. He touched a tremulous chord in the hearts of the people, and his opinions found an echo in their breasts. The pulpit and the press, perhaps, had been his voluntary choice, to print out what he had spoken ere it perished, or offer a supplement to a sermon in some awful tome of theology and reform. His Pulpit and his Press!—"those two prolific sources of faction," exclaimed Thomas Warton.

As a printer and book-vender, Crowley is distinguished by that curiosity of research which led him to be the first publisher of "the Visions of Piers Ploughman," which had hitherto slept in the dust of its manuscript state. Warton restricts the merit of his discovery merely to the fervor of a controversialist eager to propagate his own opinions; and truly the bold spirit of reform, and the satirical strokes on the ecclesiastics of the times of Edward the Third, in that remarkable and unknown author, were in unison with a reformer in the age of Reformation. It must be confessed that the historian of our poetry cherished some collegiate prejudices, and that his native good-humor is liable to change when his pen scourges a puritan and a predestinarian, as was Robert Crowley. But Warton wrote when he imagined that the suppressed absurdities of Popery required no longer any strong satire from a Calvinist; and as Crowley, too, lived to hold many dignities in the reign of Elizabeth, Crowley appeared to Warton to be the member of "a church whose doctrines and polity his undiscerning zeal had a tendency to destroy." Strype has only ventured to describe Crowley as "an earnest professor of religion." The meek curate of Low-Leyton could not rise to the magisterial indignation of one of the "heads of houses;" one who, at least, ought to have been, and who, I understand, probably missed the honor and the profit by his own ingenuous carelessness.

One of the most striking productions of this earnest reformer, for its freedom, was his address to the assembled

Parliament. The title is expressive,—"An Information and Petition against the *Oppressors of the Commoners of this Realm.* Compiled and imprinted for this only purpose,—that, among them that have to do in the Parliament, some godly-minded men may hereat take occasion to speak more in the matter than the author was able to write." Crowley too modestly alludes to any deficiencies of his own: his "information" is ample, and doubtless conveyed to the ear of those "who had to do in the Parliament" what must have startled the oldest senator.

Who are "the oppressors of the poor commoners"? All the orders in society,—the clergy, the laity, and, above all, "the Possessioners"!

This term, "the Possessioners," was a popular circulating coinage struck in the mint of our reformer, and probably included much more than meets our ear. Every land-owner, every proprietor, was a "Possessioner." Whether in an orderly primitive commonwealth there should be any "Possessioners," might be a debatable point in a parliament composed of "the poor Commons" themselves, with our Robin for their speaker. But, however this might be, "the Possessioners of this realm," as he calls them, "could only be reformed by God working in their hearts, as he did in the primitive church, when the *Possessioners* were contented and very willing *to sell their possessions, and give the price thereof to be common to all the faithful believers.*" This seems perfectly intelligible; but our reformer judged it required some explanation, as thus: "He would not have any to take him as though he went about to make all things common." Doubtless there were some propagators of this new revelation of a primitive Christian community, and as little doubt that Robin himself was one; for he adds, "If the Possessioners know how they ought to bestow their possessions," and he had already instructed them, in that case "he doubted not *it should not need to have all things made common.*" Such

was the logic of this primitive radical reformer. A bland compromise, and a sturdy menace! This "grievance" of the "Possessioners" might be reformed, till poverty itself became a test of patriotism. They had yet to learn that to impoverish the rich is not to enrich the poor.

At that day they were bewildered in their notions of property and their standards of value: they had neither discovered the sources nor the progress of the wealth of a nation. They murmured at importation, for which they seemed to pay the penalties; and looked on exportation as a conveyance of the national property to the foreigner. They fixed the prices at which all consumable articles were to be sold; the farmer's garner was inspected; the landlords who became graziers were denounced; forestallers and regrators haunted the privy councils of the king; the markets were never better supplied, and the people wondered why every article was dearer. About this time, the prices of all commodities, both in France and England, had gradually risen. The enterprise of commerce was probably working on larger capitals. As expenses increased, the landlords held that they were entitled to higher rents. In Crowley's denunciations, "God's plague" is invoked against all "lease-mongers, pilling and polling the poor commoner." The Parliament of Henry the Eighth had legalized the interest of money at ten per cent; Robin would have this "sinful act" repealed: loans should be gratuitous by the admonition in Luke, "Do ye lend, looking for no gain thereof." In this manner he applies the text against usury. They seemed to have no notion that he who bought ever intended to sell. This rude political economist proposed that all property should be kept stationary. No one should have a better portion than he was born to. Where, then, was to be found the portion of "the poor commoner" not born to any? or him whose loss of fortune was to be repaired by industry and enterprise? Prices advanced; double rents, double tithes! Our radical preacher attacks his brother

ecclesiastics. "We can neither come into the world, nor remain in it, nor go out of it, but they must have a fleece! Let it be lawful to perform all their ministries by ourselves: we can lay an honest man in his grave without a set of carrion-crows scenting their prey." The splendor of the ancient landed aristocracy and the prodigal luxury of the ecclesiastics more forcibly struck their minds than those silent arts of enlarged traffic which were perpetuating the wealth of the nation, and producing its concomitant evils.

While the people were thus agitated, divided, and distracted, the same state of disorder was shaking the more intelligent classes of society. Our mutable governments during four successive reigns gave rise to incidents which had not occurred in the annals of any other people. With the higher orders, it was not only a conflict of the old and the new religions; public disputations were frequent, creeds were yet to be drawn from school-divinity, the artificial logic of syllogisms and metaphysical disputations held before mixed audiences, where the appellant, when his memory or his acumen failed him, was disconcerted by the respondent; but when the secular arm was called in, alternately as each faction predominated, and the lives and properties of men were to be the result of these opinions, then men knew not what to think, nor how to act. What had served as argument and axiom within a few years, a state proclamation condemned as false and erroneous. A dereliction of principle spread as the general infection of the times; and, in despair, many became utterly indifferent to the event of affairs to which they could apply no other remedy than to fall in with the new course, whatever that might be.

The history of the universities exhibits this mutable picture of the nation. There were learned doctors, who, under Henry the Eighth, abjured their papacy; under Edward, vacillated, not knowing which side to lean on; under Mary, recanted; and, under Elizabeth, again abjured. Many an apostate on

both sides seemed converted into zealous penitents; persecutors of the friends with whom they had consorted, and deniers of the very opinions which they had so earnestly propagated. The facility with which some illustrious names are recorded to have given way to the pressure of events seems almost incredible; but, for the honor of human nature, on either side there were some who were neither so tractable nor so infirm.

The heads of houses stood for antiquity, with all its sacred rust of time: they looked on reform with a suspicious eye, while every man in his place marked his eager ejector on the watch. Under Edward the Sixth, Dr. Richard Smith, a potent scholastic, stood forth the stern advocate of the ancient order of things. However, to preserve his professorship, this doctor recanted of "his popish errors:" shortly afterwards he declared that it was no recantation, but a retractation signifying nothing. To make the doctor somewhat more intelligible, and a rumor spreading that "Dr. Smith was treading in his old steps," he was again enforced to read his recantation, with an acknowledgment that "his distinction was frivolous, both terms signifying the same thing." He did not recant the professorship till Cranmer invited Peter Martyr from Germany to the chair of the disguised Romanist. The political Jesuit attended even the lectures of his obtrusive rival, took notes with a fair countenance, till suddenly burst the latent explosion. An armed party menaced the life of Peter Martyr, and a theological challenge was sent from the late professor to hold a disputation on "the real presence." Peter Martyr protested against the barbarous and ambiguous terms of the scholastic logic, and would only consent to explain the mystery of the sacrament by the terms of *carnaliter* and *corporaliter;* for the Scriptures, in describing the Supper, mention the flesh and the body, not the matter and substance. He would, however, indulge them to accept the terms of *realiter* and *substantialiter*.

There was "a great hubbub" at Oxford on this most eventful issue. The popish party and the reformers were alike hurried and busied; books and arguments were heaped together; the meanest citizen took his stand. The reforming visitors of Edward arrived: all met, all but Dr. Smith, who had flown to Scotland, on his way to Louvain. However, he had left his able deputies, who were deep in the lore in which it appears Peter Martyr required frequent aid to get on. Both the adverse parties triumphed; that is usual in these logomachies: but the Romanists account for the success of the Reformed by the circumstance that their judges were Reformers.

Such abstruse subjects connected with religious associations, and maintained or refuted by the triumph or the levity of some haughty polemic, produced the most irreverent feelings among the vulgar. As the Reformation was then to be predominant, the common talk of the populace was diversified by rhymes and ballads; and it was held, at least by the wits, that there was "no real presence," since Dr. Smith had not dared to show himself. The papistical sacrament was familiarly called "Jack in the Box," "Worm's meat," and other ludicrous terms, one of which has descended to us in the term which jugglers use of *hocus pocus*. This familiar phrase, Anthony Wood informs us, originated in derision of the words, "Hoc est corpus," slovenly pronounced by the mumbling priest in delivering the emblem as a reality. As opprobrious words with the populace indicate their furious acts, scandalous scenes soon followed. The censers were snatched from the hands of the officiating priests; mass-books were flung at their heads; all red-lettered and illuminated volumes were chopped in pieces by hatchets: nor was this done always by the populace, but by students, who in their youth and their reform knew of no better means to testify their new loyalty to the visitors of Edward. One of the more ludicrous scenes among so many shameful ones was a funereal exhibi-

tion of the schoolmen. Peter Lombard, "the master of sentences," accompanied by Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, carried on biers, were tumbled into bonfires!

Five years after these memorable scenes, the same drama was to be repeated, performed by a different company of actors. Religion assumed a new face: that which had hardly been established was blasted by the name of heresy. All who had flourished under Edward were now called in question. The ancient tenants now ejected the new-comers, and affronted them by the same means they had themselves been affronted. No one at first knew how affairs were to turn out: some still clung to the reform, others were reverting to the old system. There were in fact, for some time, two religions at once in the university. The Common Prayer-book in English was, however, but faintly read, while the Mass was loudly chanted. Jewel's letter to the queen was cautiously worded. This zealous reformer in an unhappy moment had yielded to his fears, and subscribed a recantation, which he soon after abjured before a Protestant congregation in Germany. When Peter Martyr heard the little bell ring to Mass, he sighed, and said "that bell would destroy all the sound doctrine in the college." Gardiner gave him a safe-conduct homewards, which saved Peter Martyr from the insolent triumph of his rival, the scholastic Dr. Smith, and the Spanish friars with whom Mary supplied his place.

But the Marians also burned books, as likewise men!

The funeral of the schoolmen carried on their biers was too recent to be forgotten; and, in return, all Bibles in English, and all the commentators on the Bible in the vernacular idiom, and which, we are told, "for their number seemed almost infinite," were thrown together in the market-place: and the lighted pyre proclaimed to Oxford the ominous flames of superstition, which consumed not long after, opposite to Baliol College, the great unfortunate victims of reformation. There Latimer and Ridley bowed their spirits in the fires;

while Cranmer from the top of the Bocardo witnessed the immolation, praying to God to strengthen them, and felt in anticipation his own coming fate. Then followed expulsions and emigrations. We have a long list of names. Five years afterwards, such was the rapid change of scenery, these fugitives returned to repossess themselves of their seats, and were again and finally the ejectors under Elizabeth.

The history of this mutable period is remarkably shown in the singular incident of Catherine, the wife of Peter Martyr, and St. Frideswide.

Peter Martyr, when celibacy was the indispensable virtue of an ecclesiastic, brought his wife into his college, and also his bawling children. This spirit of reform was an abhorrence to the conscience and the quiet of the monks. A brothel, a prostitute, and a race of bastards, formed, according to the old inmates, the residence of the family of the reformer. The wife of Martyr died, and was interred near the relics of St. Frideswide. In the Marian days, it was resolved that the departed female should be condemned for heresy; and since the corpse lay not distant from "that religious virgin, St. Frideswide," it should be disinterred; and the Dean of Christ Church had the remains of Martyr's wife dug up, and buried in the dunghill of his stable. Five years after, when Elizabeth reigned, the fate of the disturbed bones of the wife of Martyr was recollected; and by command, with patience and ingenuity, the sub-dean collected from the dunghill the bones which time had disjointed, and placed them in a coffin in the cathedral till they should be reburied with greater solemnity. A search was at the same time made by the sub-dean for the bones of St. Frideswide, which were not found where they had reposed for centuries. They had been hidden by some relic-adoring Catholic, to save them from the profane hands of the triumphant heretics of Edward the Sixth. In the obscurest part of the church, after much seeking, two silken bags were discovered, which had carefully preserved the relics

of St. Frideswide. The sub-dean, who seems to have been at once a Romanist and a Reformer, considered that these bones of Peter Martyr's wife and the female saint should receive equal honors. He put them in the same coffin, and they were re-interred together. This incident provoked some scoffs from the witless, and some grave comments from those who stood more in awe of the corpse of the saint than of the sinner. Thus they were buried and coupled together; and a scholar, whether a divine or a philosopher his ambiguous style will not assure us, inscribed this epitaph:—

Hic jacet Religio cum Superstitione.

Did the profound writer insinuate a wish, that in one grave should lie mingled together religion with superstition? or that they are still as inseparable as the bones of the wife of Peter Martyr with the bones of St. Frideswide? Or did he mean nothing more than the idle antithesis of a scholar's pen?

At this uncertain crisis of the alliance between Church and State, the history of our English Bible exhibits a singular picture of the Church, which, from courting the favor of the great, gradually grew into its own strength, and rested on its own independence. We perceive it first attracting the royal eye, and afterwards securing the patronage of ministers. This phenomenon is observable in the Bible commanded to be printed by Edward the Sixth. There we view his majesty's portrait printed and illumined in red. Under Elizabeth, in the same Bible, omitting only the papistic fish-days, we are surprised by the two portraits of the Earl of Leicester, placed before the Book of Joshua, and Cecil Lord Burleigh, adorning the Psalms. This is the first edition of the Bishops' Bible. But subsequently, in 1574, we discover that the portraits of the royal favorites are both withdrawn, and a map of the Holy Land substituted, while the arms of Archbishop Parker seem to have been let into the vacancy which Lord Burleigh erst so gloriously occupied. The map of the Holy Land

unquestionably is more appropriate than the portraits of the two statesmen; but the arms of the archbishop introduced into the Scriptures indicate a more egotistic spirit in the good prelate than perhaps becomes the saintly humility of the pastor. The whole is an exhibition of that worldliness which in its first weakness is uncertain of the favor of the higher powers, but which cannot conceal its triumph in its full-grown strength: the great ecclesiastic, no longer collecting portraits of ministers, stamps his own arms on the sacred volume, to ratify his own power!

PRIMITIVE DRAMAS.

SCRIPTURAL dramas, composed by the ecclesiastics, furnished the nations of Europe with the only drama they possessed during many centuries. Voltaire ingeniously suggested, that GREGORY of Nazianzen, to wean the Christians of Constantinople from the dramas of Greece and Rome, composed sacred dramas: *the Passion of Christ* afforded one of the deepest interest. This remarkable transition might have occurred to this father of the Church from the circumstance, that the ancient Greek tragedy had originally formed a religious spectacle; and the choruses were turned into Christian hymns. Warton considered this fact as a new discovery in the obscure annals of the earliest drama.* The temples of the idols were for ever to be closed; for true religion and triumphant faith could show the miraculous Being, who, blending the celestial with the human nature, was no longer the empty fable of the poet. The gross simplicity of the inventors, and the undisturbed faith of the people, perceived nothing profane in the representation of an awful mystery by a familiar play. Christian or Pagan, the populace remains the same, and must be amused: the invention of scriptural plays would keep alive their religious faith, and sacred dramas would be a happy substitute for those of which they were denied evermore to be spectators.

* Warton's "Hist. of Eng. Poetry," iii. 195, 8vo edition; but it has been suggested that, as St. Gregory composed more poetically, this earliest sacred drama was the production of a later writer, another Gregory, Bishop of Antioch, A.D. 572. The dramatist, however, was an ecclesiastic; and that point only is important on the present occasion.

This attempt to Christianize the drama did not produce an immediate effect: but the Roman dramatic art could not fail to degenerate with the Roman Empire; and the actors themselves were but the descendants of the mimi, a race of infamous buffoons, objects of the horror and the excommunication of the primitive Fathers.*

In the obscurity of the mediæval period, the origin of these sacred dramas in Europe is lost. They are only incidentally noticed by those who had yet no notions of the drama. But, though in England their remains are found at a much earlier period than in any other country, this seems to have been a mere accident, from the utter neglect, or rather ignorance, of other nations of the origin of their own early drama: for these scriptural plays, judging by those which we possess, seem struck in the same mint, and are worked out of a common stock; and their appearance, we can hardly doubt, was coeval. Monks were the writers or inventors, and a general communication was kept up with Rome throughout every European realm. The subjects and the personages of these biblical dramas are treated with the same inartificial arrangement, and, when translated, it would be difficult to distinguish between a French, a Flemish, or an English mystery; and in their progressive state, branching out into three distinct classes, they passed in all countries through the same mutations.

* TERTULLIAN, CHRYSOSTOM, LACTANTIUS, CYPRIAN, and others have vehemently declaimed against theatres and actors. It is doubtless the invectives of the Fathers which have been the true origin of the puritanic denouncement against "stage-plays" and "play-goers." The Fathers furnished ample quotations for PRYNNE in his "Histriomastix." It is, however, curious to observe, that at a later day, in the thirteenth century, the great schoolman, Thomas Aquinas, greatly relaxed the prohibitions: confessing that amusement is necessary to the happiness of man, he allows the decent exercise of the histrionic art. See a curious tract, "the Stage Condemned," which contains a collection of the opinions of the Fathers, 1698. Riccoboni, "Sur les Théâtres," does not fail to appeal to the great schoolman.

It has been conjectured that they were first introduced into Italy, from its intercourse with the metropolis of the Greek Empire; but, when we have recourse to its literary recorder, we gather nothing but ambiguity. Tiraboschi is dubious whether the early Italian mysteries exhibited in the year 1264 were any thing more than a dumb show, or the processional display of a religious pageant. Decided, on system, not to approve of such familiar exhibitions of sacred themes, the Jesuit has cautiously noticed two companies who evidently had performed a mystery, or miracle-play. In that piece there is a direction that "an angel and the virgin *sing;*" but our learned Jesuit will not venture even to surmise that "the virgin and the angel" *acted* their parts, but merely chanted a poem.* The literary antiquary Signorelli inclines to fix the uncertain date of the first sacred drama so late as in 1445.† In France, these early scriptural exhibitions were so little comprehended, that Le Grand d'Aussy, in his pretension that his nation possessed the drama in the thirteenth century, derives the origin of their mysteries from such pieces as the three fabliaux which he has given as the earliest dramas.‡ So little conversant in his day — not a distant one — were the French antiquaries with a subject which has of late become familiar to their tastes. We learn nothing positive of their "Mysteries" till their "Confraerie de la Passion" was incorporated in 1402.

* "Tiraboschi," iv.

† These dramas subsequently formed no uncommon spectacle in the streets of Italy: whence some Italian critics have fancied that the Gothic poem of Dante — his Hell, his Purgatory, and his Paradise — was an idea caught from the threefold stage of a mystery which often fixed his musings in the streets of his own Florence. As late as in the year 1739, a mystery of *the Damned Soul*, acted by living personages, was still exhibited by a company of strollers in Turin: we have the amusing particulars in a letter by Spence. — *Spence's Anecdotes*, 397. They have sunk to the humble state of puppet-shows, and are still exhibited at Carnival-time at Venice and elsewhere.

‡ See the note and this extraordinary blunder in *Fabliaux*, ii. 152.

The earliest of these representations necessarily would be in Latin,* and performed in monasteries by the ecclesiastics themselves, on festival days: in this state, how could they have been designed for the people? Aware of this difficulty, and convinced that these holy plays were in their origin intended for popular instruction and recreation, it has been conjectured that the Latin mystery was accompanied by a pantomimic show for the benefit of the people; but an impatient concourse could be little affected by the action of the performers, almost as incomprehensible as the language was unintelligible. The people, a great animal only to be fondled in one way, as usual, worked out their own wants: they taught learned clerks the only method by which they were to be amused, by having the same thing after their own fashion, and to be comprehended in their own language; and the day at last arrived when even the people themselves would be actors. In the obscurity of the mediæval period, the literary antiquary has often to feel his way in the darkness, till among uncertain things he fancies that he grasps the palpable. We are not furnished with precise dates; but some natural circumstances may account for the introduction of the mysteries in the *vernacular idiom*. About the eighth century, merchants carried on their trades in the great fairs; and, to attract the people together, jugglers, minstrels, and buffoons were well paid, and the populace flocked. Such a multitudinous concourse appears to have created alarm among their great lords, and the ecclesiastics in vain proscribed these licentious revelries. It would be nothing more than a stroke of their accustomed policy, if we imagine, that, seeing the people were eager after such public entertainments, the monks should take them into their own hands; and offering a far more imposing exhibition than even the tricks of jugglers, combining piety with merri-

* Mr. Wright has published a curious collection of Latin mysteries of the twelfth century. [For a detailed notice of other printed collections, see note to "Curiosities of Literature," vol. ii. p. 15. — Ed.]

ment, at once awe and delight the people by their scriptural histories and the legends of saints, in the language common to them all, thus enticing them from profane mummeries. It was a revolution in the history of the people, who, without education, seemed to grow learned in the mysteries and to be witnesses of miracles!

This account is not incongruous with another, probably not less true, and which indeed has been received as indisputable among the more ancient literary historians of France, and is well known by the verses of Boileau in his "Art of Poetry." Palmers and pilgrims, — the one returning from the East, bearing in their caps the hallowed palm-branch of Palestine; and the other from some distant shrine, their chaplets and cloaks covered with the many-colored scallops, — taking their stand in thoroughfares, and leaning on their staffs, while their pendent relics and images attracted the gazer, would win an audience from among the people. These venerable itinerants or semi-saints recited their sacred narratives in verse, or even in prose: they had sojourned amid "the holy places" which they described; they had their adventures to tell, serious or comic; and that many of these have entered into the great body of ROMANCE, and were caught up by the Trouveres, we can easily imagine. These strollers excited the piety and contributed to the amusement of their simple auditors, who, in the course of time, occasionally provided for these actors a stage on a green in the vicinage of their town: thus an audience of burghers and clowns, and no critics, was first formed. The ecclesiastics adopted performances so certain of popular attraction, and became the sole authors of these inartificial dramas, as they were of romances and chronicles. They had but one object, and knew to treat it only in one way. They imagined that they were instructing the people by initiating them into scriptural history, — the only history then known; and, by keeping the sources of popular recreation in their own hands, they looked for their success in

the degree they excited their terror or their piety, and not less their ribald merriment: and, for the people, the profane drollery and the familiar dialogue were as consistent with their feelings as the articles of their creed, for which they would have died, as well as laughed at.

These primeval dramas are not inconsiderable objects in the philosophy of literary history. In England,* and probably throughout Europe, they long kept their standing: they linger in Italy, and still possess devout Spain. Not long since, at Seville, they had their mysteries adapted to the seasons, — the Crucifixion for Good Friday, and the Nativity for Christmas, and the Creation whenever they chose; and a recent editor of the plays of Cervantes assures us, that these *Autos Sacramentales* still form a source of amusement and edification to the pilgrims at the shrine of St. Jago de Compostella, which it seems still receives such visitors.†

These scriptural plays were known in England before 1119: they formed public performances in the metropolis in 1180. They were then confined to the monasteries; and, when the audience required the space, they were exhibited in churches, and sometimes even in cemeteries. So true it is that the first theatres were churches, and the first actors

* Perhaps the very last remains of such rude dramatic exhibitions are yet to be traced in our counties, — about Christmas-tide, or rather old Christmas, whose decrepit age is personified. In Lancashire and Yorkshire, and also in Dorsetshire, families are visited by "the great Emperor of the Turks" and St. George of England, or by the lion-hearted Richard. After a fierce onset, ringing their tin swords, the Saracens groan and drop. The leech appears, holding his phial: from some drops the dead survive their fate, and rise for the hospitable supper. The dialogue, however, has not been so traditional as the exhibition. The curious portion of these ancient exhibitions is, therefore, totally lost in the substitutions of the rude rustics. The wassail-songs, or the Christmas-carols, have come down with fewer losses than these ancient "Tales of the Crusaders;" for the language of emotion and the notice of old picturesque customs cling to the memory, and endure with their localities. But for these we must travel far from the land of the Cockneys.

† Bouterwek.

churchmen. Some reprobated the sight of the priestly character, or the "fols clers," "mad clerks," in their grotesque disguisings: if they were sanctioned by one pope, they were condemned by another. The clergy, except on some rare occasion, when exhibiting before royalty or nobility,* were at length not reluctant to yield their places to a new race of performers. In the metropolis, they never lost their control over these representations; for they consigned them to the care of their inferior brethren, the parish clerks: but in provincial towns it was not long ere the people themselves discovered that they, with some little assistance from the neighboring monasteries, were competent to take them into their own hands. The honest members of guilds or corporations, of mechanics and tradesmen, formed themselves into brotherhoods of actors, ambitious of displaying their mimetic faculty to their townsfolk. The play had now become the people's play, and the scale of the representation widened at every point: it was to be acted in an open plain, and it was to extend sometimes through eight days.† Such was the concourse of spectators; and indeed the performers were themselves a crowd. All were anxious to show themselves in some part, and such a play might require nearly a hundred personages. In a miracle-play, the whole life of a saint, from the cradle to martyrdom, was displayed in the same piece: the youth, the middle-age, and the caducity of the eminent

* The clergy long continued to assist at these exhibitions, if they did not always act in them. In 1417, an *English mystery* was exhibited before the Emperor Sigismund, at the Council of Constance, on the usual subject of the Nativity. The *English bishops* had it rehearsed several days, that the actors might be perfect before their imperial audience. We are not told in what language their *English mystery* was recited; but we are furnished with a curious fact, that "the Germans consider this play as the first introduction of that sort of dramatic performance in their country." — *Henry of Monmouth*, by the Rev. J. E. Tyler, ii. 61.

† The Spanish nation, unchangeable in their customs, have retained the last remains of the ancient mysteries in the divisions of their dramas, called "Jornadas."

personage, required to be enacted by three different actors; so that there were the first, the second, and the third Jacob, to emulate one another, and provoke bickerings; townsfolk when acting, it appears, being querulously jealous. Something of scenical illusion was contrived, and what in the style of the green-room is termed "properties"* was attempted, by the description we find in the directions to the actors, and by the mischances which occurred to the unpractised performers by their clumsy machinery. Their mode of representation was so much alike, that the same sort of ludicrous accidents have come down to us, relative to our native mysteries, as occurred in those of France. Bishop Percy has quoted a malicious trick played by the Flemish owl-glass, the buffoon of the times, among his neighbors in one of these mysteries:† a Judas had nearly hanged himself, and the cross had nearly realized a crucifixion. Among these unlucky attempts, they gilded over the face to represent the Eternal Father: the honest burgher, nearly suffocated, never appeared again; and the next day it was announced, that, for the future, the Deity should lie "covered by a cloud." A scaffold was built up of three or more divisions for "the stage-play." Paradise opened at the top; the world moved in the centre; and the yawning throat of an immeasurable dragon, as the devils run in and out, showed the bottomless pit: and whenever the protruding wings of that infernal monster approached, "and fanned" the near spectators, the terror was real.

These mysteries abound with a licentiousness to which the rude simplicity of the age was innocently insensible; a ludicrous turn is often given to the solemn incidents of Holy Writ,

* "A sheep-skin for Jews, wigs for the Apostles, and vizards for Devils," appear in the churchwardens' accounts at Tewkesbury, 1578, "for the players' geers." — *Hist. of Dramatic Poetry*, ii. 140. The same diligent inquirer has also discovered the theatrical term "properties," in allusion to the furniture of the stage, and which is so used by Shakspeare, employed in its present sense in an ancient morality. — *Ib.*, ii. 129.

† "Reliques of Ancient Poetry," i. 129.

and the legend of a saint opened an unbounded scope to their mother-wit. The usual remark of the people, when they had been pleased with a performance, was, "To-day the mystery was very fine and devout, and the devils played most pleasantly." * The devils were the buffoons, and compliment one another with the most atrocious titles. The spectators, who shed tears at the torturous crucifixion, would listen with delight to the volume of reciprocal abuse voided by Satan and the satanic, whose very names, at any other time or place, would have paralyzed the intellect. This strange mixture of religious and ludicrous emotions attests that the authors and the spectators were in the childhood of society, satisfied that they were good Christians. Such were the earliest attempts of our dramatic representations; but men must tread with naked feet before they put on the sock and buskin.

Several of these annual exhibitions in provincial towns have descended to us, as those of the Chester Whitsun-plays, and others in great towns. Originally, doubtless, written in Latin, they soon submitted to the Norman rule, vigilant to practise every means to diffuse the *French* language; but in this state they could not deeply delight the great body of the Saxon people.† The monk, Ralph Higden, under the influ-

* "Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française." — The proverbial phrase is accompanied by a very superfluous remark: "Ce mot a passé d'usage avec les mœurs de ces temps anciens." — See also "Dict. de Trevoux," art. "Mystère."

† That the translation of the "Chester Plays" was made from the *French*, and not from the *Latin*, as Warton supposed, is ingeniously elucidated by Mr. Collier. In the English translation, some of the original French passages have been preserved. — *Annals of the Stage*, ii. 129.

When Warton found that these plays were translated into English, he concluded that they were from the Latin. He totally forgot that the French was long the prevalent language of England. And this important circumstance, too often overlooked by preceding inquirers, has thrown much confusion in our literary history.

The best account we have of Ralph Higden may be found in the *first* volume of Lardner's Cyclopædia on "the Early History of the English Stage," a work of some original research, at page 193.

ence of that national spirit which had been evinced by some former native monks, directed his efforts to the relief of his countrymen. Thrice he journeyed to Rome to obtain the permission of his holiness to translate these holy plays into the vernacular *English* for the people.* Three journeys to Rome indicate some difficulty about the propriety of this mode of edifying the populace, of which, indeed, there were conflicting opinions. But the time was favorable: the youthful monarch on the throne, our third Edward, was beginning to encourage the use of the vernacular idiom; and, in 1338, Higden put forth mysteries in the native tongue, and thus accomplished what, in the great volume of the "Polychronicon," he has so energetically exhorted should be done for the maintenance of what he termed "the birth-tongue."

The day could not fail to arrive in the gradations of the public intellect, even such as it then was, that society would feel the want of something more directly operating on their sympathies or their daily experience than the unvaried scriptural tale. Mysteries, however devout, by such familiar repetition would lose something of their awfulness, as miracle-plays would satiate their tastes as they became deficient in the freshness of invention. The first approaches of this change in their feelings are observable in the later miracle-plays, where, as a novel attraction to the old plays, abstract personations are partially introduced; but this novelty was to be carried much higher, and to include a whole set of new dramatic personages. A more intellectual faculty was now exercised in the plan of the MORALITY, or moral play.† This was no inconsiderable advancement in the progress of society:

* The earliest and rudest known miracle-play in English has been published by Mr. Halliwell, — "the Harrowing of Hell." It was written in the reign of Edward the Second, and is a curious instance of the childhood of the drama.

† The reign of Henry the Sixth may be fixed upon as the epoch of a new species of dramatic representation, known by the name of a Moral. — *Collier*, i. 23.

it was deepening the recesses of the human understanding, awakening and separating the passions; it was one of those attempts which appear in the infancy of imagination, consisting, not of human beings, but of their shadowy reflections, in the personification of their passions; in a word, it was allegory. To relieve the gravity of this ethical play, which was in some danger of calling on the audience for deeper attention than their amusement could afford, the morality not only retained their old favorite, the Devil, but introduced a more natural buffoon in the Vice, who performed the part of the domestic fool of our ancestors, or the clown of our pantomime.

These unsubstantial personages of allegory, these apparitions of human nature, were to assume a more bodily shape, when not only the passions, but the individual characters whom they agitated, were exhibited in every-day life; not, however, yet venturing into a wide field of society, but peeping from a corner: it was nothing more than a single act, satirical and comic, in a dialogue sustained by three or four professional characters of the times. It was called the INTERLUDE, or "*a play between*," to zest by its pleasantry the intervals of a luxurious, and sometimes a wearisome banquet. The most dramatic interludes were the invention of JOHN HEYWOOD, the jester of Henry the Eighth. The Scottish bard, Douglas, the Bishop of Dunkeld, alludes to these interludes, in his "Paleys of Honour:"—

> "Grete was the preis the feast royál to sene:
> At ease they eat, with INTERLUDES between." *

* The reader may gratify his curiosity, and derive considerable amusement, from the skilful analysis of primitive dramas, both manuscript and printed, which Mr. COLLIER has drawn up with true dramatic taste. There are also copious specimens in a curious article on Heywood in the volume on "the English Drama" of Lardner's Cyclopædia,—the labor of a learned antiquary. [One of Heywood's interludes was printed by the Percy Society from his manuscript in the British Museum, under the editorial care of Mr. Fairholt, who prefixed an analysis with copious extracts from his other interludes.] The progress of the drama was similar both in France and England:

Such was the march of events, the steppings which were conducting the national genius to the verge of tragedy and comedy: a vast interval of time and labor separates the writers of these primitive plays from the fathers of dramatic art; yet, however ludicrous to us the simplicity of the age, often these singular productions betray shrewd humor and natural emotions. To condemn them as barbarous and absurd would be forming a very inadequate notion of the influence of these earliest of our European dramas on their contemporaries. An enlightened lover of the arts has said, perhaps with great truth, that Raphael never received from his age such flattering applause, and excited such universal approbation, as did Cimabué, the rude father of his art. The first essays strike more deeply than even the masterpieces of a subsequent age, after all its successful labor; for its more finished excellence depends partly on reflection, as well as on sensation.

The mystery and the morality lingered among us; but, in the improved taste and literature of the court of Henry the Eighth, the facetious INTERLUDE, while it was facetious, won

yet our vivacious neighbors seem to have invented a peculiar burlesque piece of their own, under the title of *Sotties*, and whose chief personage takes the quality of *Prince des Sots;* and *La Mère Sotte*, who is represented with her infant *Sots*. These pieces still retained their devout character, with an intermixture of profane and burlesque scenes, highly relished by the populace. "Ils le nommèrent par un quolibet vulgaire, *Jeux de Pois pilez*, et ce fut selon toutes les apparences à cause de mélange du sacré et du profane qui régnait dans ces sortes de jeux." The cant phrase which the people coined for this odd mixture of sacred and farcical subjects, of *Mashed Peas*, may lose its humor with us; but we find by Bayle, art. "D'Assoucy," that they were collected and printed under this title, and fetched high prices among collectors. These *Sotties* were acted by a brotherhood calling themselves *Enfans sans Soucy*. — PARFAIT: *Hist. du Théâtre Français*, i. 52. One of their chief composers was PIERRE GRINGOIRE, of whose rare *Sotties* I have several reprints by the learned Abbé Caron. Gringoire invented and performed his *Sotties*, in ridicule of the pope, on a scaffold or stage, to charm his royal master, Louis the Twelfth, in 1511. For an ample list of his gay satires, see "Biog. Universelle," art. "Gringoire."

the royal smile. The successive agitations of the age, however, could not fail to reflect its tempers in these public exhibitions. In the reforming government of Edward the Sixth, the miracle-plays were looked on as Romish spectacles, and were fast sinking into neglect, when the clergy of the papistic queen retrograded into this whole fabulous mythology; adepts not only in the craft of miracles, but desirous, by these shows, or "plays of miracles," to revive the taste in the imaginations of the people. The public authorities patronized what recently they had laughed at or had scorned. On Corpus Christi Day, the Lord Mayor and the Privy Council were spectators of "the Passion of Christ," always an affecting drama; and it was again represented before this select audience: and on St. Olave's Day, the truly "miracle-play" of that legendary saint was enacted in the church dedicated to the saint.*

The history of the INTERLUDE more particularly marks an epoch; for it enters into our political history. Mysteries and moralities were purely religious or ethical themes: but the comic interludes took a more adventurous course; and their writers, accommodating themselves to the fashions of the day, were the organs of the prevalent factions then dividing the unquiet realm.

From the earliest moment of the projected reformation, or emancipation from the papal dominion, by Henry, we discover the players of interludes at their insidious work; but affairs were floating in that uncertain state when the new had by no means displaced the old. In 1527, Henry the Eighth was greatly diverted at an interlude where the heretic Luther and his wife were brought on the stage, and the reformers were ridiculed.† The king, in the creed and the ceremonies, remained a Romanist; and, in 1533, a proclamation inhibits "the playing of interludes concerning doctrines now in ques-

* Strype's "Mem. of Eccles. Hist.," iii. 379.

† "Annals of the Stage," i. 107.

tion and controversy."* "The Defender of the Faith" was still irresolute to defend or to attack. In 1543, an act of Parliament was passed for the control of dramatic representations; and, at this later date, this reforming monarch decreed that "no person should play in interludes any matter contrary to the doctrines of the Church of Rome"! Chronology in history is not only useful to date events, but to date the passions of sovereigns. It was absolutely necessary for Edward the Sixth, on his ascension, immediately to repeal this express act of Parliament of his father;† and then the emancipated interluders now, openly, with grave logic or laughing ridicule, struck at all "the Roman superstitions." Hence we had Catholic and Protestant dramas. The Romanists had made very free strictures on Cromwell, Cranmer, and their followers; and on the side of the reformed we have no deficiency of oppugners of the Romish Church. Under Henry the Eighth, we have the sacred drama of "Every-man," a single personage, by whom the writer not unaptly personifies human nature. This drama came from the Romanists to recall the auditors back to the forsaken ceremonies and shaken creed of their fathers. Under Edward the Sixth, we have "Lusty Juventus," whom Satan and his old son Hypocrisy, with an extraordinary nomenclature of "holy things," would inveigle back to that seductive harlot, "Abominable Living," which the reformer imagined was the favorite Dulcinea of "the false priests."‡ On the accession of Mary, this queen hastened a proclamation against the interludes of the reformers. The term used in the proclamation looks like an ironical allusion to a word which now had long been bandied on the lips of the populace. It specifies to be for "the *reformation* of busy meddlers in matters of religion." A strict watch was

* Warton's "Hist. of Eng. Poetry," iii. 428, 8vo.

† Rastell's "Collection of Statutes," fo. 32—d.

‡ Both these ancient dramas are reprinted in Hawkins's "Origin of the English Drama." Many such dramas remain in manuscript.

kept on the players, some of whom suffered for enacting a reformed interlude. Such plays seemed to have been patronized in domestic secrecy. The interference of the Star Chamber was called forth in 1556 for the total suppression of dramatic entertainments. In many places, some magistrates had slackened their pursuit after "players," and reluctantly obeyed the public authorities. The first act of Elizabeth resembled in its character those of her brother Edward and her sister Mary, however opposite were the systems of their governments. The queen put a sudden stop to the enacting of all interludes which opposed the progress of the Reformation; there seemed to be no objection to any of a different cast: but Elizabeth lived to be an auditor of more passionate dramas than these theological logomachies performed on the stage, where the dull poet had sometimes quoted chapter and verse in Genesis or St. Matthew.

It is not generally known, that, while these Catholic and Protestant dramas were opposed to each other in England, at the same period the Huguenots in France had also entertained the derisory Muse of the more comic interludes. There was, however, this difference in the fortunes of the writers: as in France the government had never reformed nor changed their position, there could have been no period which admitted of the public representation of these satirical dramas. In their dramatic history, it was long considered that the subjects of these Hugonistic dramas were too tender to bear the handling; and the brothers Parfait, in their copious "History of the French Theatre," only afford a slight indication of "the turbulent Calvinists," who had spread "pieces of dangerous heresy and fanaticism against the pope, the cardinals, and the bishops; works which could not be noticed without profaning the page"!—and therefore they refrain from giving even their titles! It is in this spirit, and with such apologies, that historians have often castrated their own history. The existence of these dramas might have escaped our knowledge,

had not the more enlightened judgment of the Duke de la Vallière supplied what the more stubborn Romanists had suppressed. This lover of literature has favored the curious with the interesting analysis of two rare French Protestant plays, "Le Marchand Converti," in 1558; and "Le Pape Malade et tirant à sa Fin," in 1561. Allowing largely for the gross invectives of the Calvinist, — *les impiétés*, — they display an original comic invention, and sparkle with the most lively sallies.* It is remarkable that "Le Marchand Converti," at such an early period of modern literature, is a regular comedy of five acts, introduced by a prologue in verse: odes are interspersed; and each act concludes with a chorus, whom the author calls "the company." The classical form of this unacted play, instinct with the spirit of the new reform, betrays the work of a learned hand.

* "Bibliothèque du Théâtre Français," iii. 263, ascribed to the Duke de la Vallière. He has preserved many passages exquisitely humorous. He felt awkwardly in performing his duty to his readers, after what his predecessors, Messieurs Parfait, had declared; and, to calm the terrors of *les personnes scrupuleuses*, it is amusing to observe his plea, or his apology, for noticing these admirable anti-papistic satires: "They are outrageous, and abound with impieties; but they are extremely well written for their time, and truly comic. I considered that I could not avoid giving these extracts, were it only to show to what lengths the first pretended reformers carried their unreasonable violence against the holy father and the court of Rome." The apology for their transcription, if not more ingenuous, is at least more ingenious, than the apology for their suppression.

THE REFORMER BISHOP BALE; AND THE ROMANIST JOHN HEYWOOD, THE COURT JESTER.

BALE, Bishop of Ossory, and JOHN HEYWOOD, the court jester, were contemporaries, and both equally shared in the mutable fortunes of the satiric dramas of their times; but they themselves were the antipodes of each other: the earnest Protestant BALE, the gravest reformer, and the inflexible Catholic HEYWOOD, noted for "his mad, merry wit," form one of those remarkable disparities which the history of literature sometimes offers.

BALE was originally educated in a monastery: he found an early patron, and professed the principles of the Reformation; and, like Luther, sealed his emancipation from Catholic celibacy by a wife, whom he tenderly describes as "his faithful Dorothea." It was a great thing for a monk to be mated with such constancy at a time when women were usually to be described as shrews, or worse. From the day of marriage, the malice of persecution haunted the hapless heretic: such personal hatreds could not fail of being mutual. He seems to have too hastily anticipated the Reformation under Henry the Eighth; for, though that monarch had freed himself from "the Bishop of Rome," he had by no means put aside the doctrines; and Bale, who had already begun a series of two and twenty reforming interludes in his "maternal idiom," found it advisable to leave a kingdom but half reformed. He paused not, however, till he had written a whole library against "the Papelins:" the last production always seemed the most envenomed. On the death of Henry, he unex-

pectedly appeared before Edward the Sixth, who imagined that he had died. Bale had the misfortune to be promoted to the Irish bishopric of Ossory, — to plant Protestantism in a land of Papistry! Frustrated in his unceasing fervor, Bale escaped from martyrdom by hiding himself in Dublin. The death of Edward relieved our Protestant bishop from this sad dilemma; for, on the accession of Mary, he flew into Switzerland. There he indulged his anti-papistical vein: the press sent forth a brood, among which might have been some of better growth, for he labored on our British biography and literature; but, as there were yet but few Protestants to record, it flowed, and sometimes overflowed, against all the friends of the Papacy. Pits, who subsequently resumed the task, a sullen and fierce Papist, in revenge omitted, in the line of our illustrious Britons, Wickliffe and every Wickliffite. Such were the beginnings of our literary history. On the accession of Elizabeth, his country received back its exile; but Bale refused to be reinstated in his Irish see, and sunk into a quiet prebendary of Canterbury. Fuller has called our good bishop "Bilious Bale." Some conceive that this bishop has suffered ill treatment merely for having thrown out some remarkable or abominable invectives. Proselytes, however sincere in their new convictions and their old hatreds, both operating at once, color their style as some do their faces, till by long use the heightened tint seems faint; and they go on deepening it, and thus at last the natural countenance is lost in the artificial mass.

If Bale were no poet, in the singular dramas we have, he at least displays a fluent invention: he tells plainly what is meant, which we like to learn; and I do not know whether it be owing to his generally indifferent verse that we sometimes are struck by an idiomatic phrase, and a richness of rhymes peculiar to himself, which sustain our attention.*

* One of these interludes has been recently published by the Camden Society, under the skilful editorship of Mr. Collier, from a manuscript cor-

Of JOHN HEYWOOD, the favorite jester of Henry the Eighth and his daughter Mary, and the intimate of Sir Thomas More, whose congenial humor may have mingled with his own, more table-talk and promptness at reply have been handed down to us than of any writer of the times. His quips and quirks and quibbles are of his age; but his copious pleasantry still enlivens: these smoothed the brow of Henry, and relaxed the rigid muscles of the melancholy Mary. He had the *entrée* at all times to the privy-chamber, and often to administer a strong dose of himself, which her majesty's physicians would prescribe. He is distinguished as Heywood the epigrammatist: a title fairly worn by the man who has left six centuries of epigrams, collected and adjusted as many English proverbs in his verse, besides the quaint conceits of "crossing of proverbs."* Of these six hundred epigrams, it is possible not a single one is epigrammatic: we have never had a Martial. Even when it became a fashion to write books of epigrams half a century subsequently, they usually closed in a miserable quibble, a dull apothegm, or at the best, like those of Sir John Harrington, in a plain story rhymed. Wit, in our sense of the term, was long unpractised, and the modern epigram was not yet discovered.

Heywood, who had flourished under Henry, on the change in the reign of Edward, clung to the ancient customs. He was a Romanist; but, had he not recovered in some degree from the cecity of superstition, he had not so keenly exposed, as he has done, some vulgar impostures. It happened, however, that some unlucky jest, trenching on treason, flew from the lips of the unguarded jester: it would have hanged

rected by Bale himself in the Devonshire collection: it is entitled "Kynge Johan" [and founded on events in his reign, made subservient to the ultra Protestantism of Bale]. Others have been printed in the "Harleian Collection," vol. i.; and in Dodsley's "Old English Drama."

* That is, proverbs with humorous answers to them. — See the "Bibliographical and Critical Catalogue," by Mr. Payne Collier, of Lord Francis Egerton's "Library of Early English Literature," p. 2.

some; but pleasant verses promptly addressed to the young sovereign saved him at the pinch. However, he gathered from "the council" that this was no jesting-time; and he left the country in the day that Bale was returning from his emigration under King Henry. On Mary's accession, Bale again retired, and Heywood suddenly appeared at court. Asked by the queen, "What wind blew him there?" — "Two specially: the one to see your majesty!" he replied. "We thank you for that," said the queen; "but, I pray you, what is the other?" "That your grace might see me!" There was shrewdness in this pleasantry, to bespeak the favor of his royal patroness. Four short years did not elapse ere Elizabeth opened her long reign; and then the merry Romanist for ever bid farewell to his native land, while Bale finally sat beside his English hearth. These were very movable and removable times, and no one was certain how long he should remain in his new locality.

The genius of HEYWOOD created "the merrie interlude:" unlike BALE, as in all things, he never opened the Bible for a stage-play, but, approaching Comedy, he became the painter of manners, and the chronicler of domestic life. Warton certainly has hastily and contradictorily censured Heywood, without a right comprehension of his peculiar subjects; yet he admired at least one of Heywood's writings, in which, being anonymous, he did not recognize the victim of his vague statements. Warton and his followers have obscured a true genius for exuberant humor, keen irony, and exquisite ridicule, such as Rabelais and Swift would not have disdained, and have not always surpassed. One of his interludes is accessible for those who can revel in a novel scene of comic invention. This interlude is "the Four P's, — the Palmer, the Pardoner, the Poticary, and the Pedler." Each flouts the other, and thus display their professional knaveries.*

* Dodsley's "Old Plays," vol. i.

The ludicrous strokes of this piece could never have come from a bigot to the ancient superstition, however attached to the ancient creed. We cannot tell how far the jester may have been influenced by a proclamation of 28th of Henry the Eighth, to protect "the poor innocent people from those light persons called pardoners by color of their indulgences," &c. He has curiously exhibited to us all the trumpery regalia of papistry; as he also exposed "the Friery" in another interlude, which has all the appearance of a merry tale from Boccaccio.

So plays the jocund spirit of Heywood the jester, in his minstrel-verse and pristine idiom; but we have now to tell another tale. Heywood is the author of a ponderous volume, and an interminable "parable" of "the Spider and the Fly." It is said to have occupied the thoughts of the writer during twenty years. This unlucky "heir of his invention" is dressed out with a profusion of a hundred woodcuts, — then rare and precious things, — among which starts up the full-length of the author more than once. Warton impatiently never reached the conclusion, where the author has confided to us the secret of his incomprehensible intention. There Warton would have found that "we must understand that the spiders represent the Protestants, and the flies the Catholics; that the maid with the broom sweeping away the cobwebs (to the annoyance of their weavers) is Mary, armed with the civil power, executing the commands of her Master (Christ) and her mistress (Mother Church)." We see at once all the embarrassments and barrenness of this wearying and perplexed fancy. Warton contents himself with what he calls "a sensible criticism," taken from Harrison, a Protestant minister, and one of the partners of Holinshed's Chronicle: it is as mordacious as a periodical criticism. "Neither he who made this book, nor any who reads it, can reach unto the meaning." Warton, to confirm "the sensible criticism," alleges as a proof of its unpopularity, that it was never

reprinted; but it was published in 1556, and Mary died in 1558. A vindication of "the maid with the broom" might be equally unwelcome to "spiders and flies."

How it happened that the court jester who has sent forth such volumes of mirth could have kept for years hammering at a dull and dense poem, is a literary problem which perhaps admits of a solution. We may ascribe this aberration of genius to the author's position in society. Heywood was a Romanist from principle: that he was no bigot, his free satires on vulgar superstitions attest. But the jester at times was a thoughtful philosopher. One of his interludes is "the Play of the Weather," where the ways of Providence are vindicated in the distribution of the seasons. But "mad, merry Heywood" was the companion of many friends — Papists and Protestants — at court and in all the world over. His creed was almost whole in broken times; perhaps agreeing a little with the Protestant, and then reverting to the Romanist. In this unbalanced condition, mingling the burlesque with the solemn, unwilling to excommunicate his friend the Protestant "spider," and intent to vindicate the Romanist "fly," often he laid aside, and often resumed, his confused emotions. It might require dates to settle the precise allusions: what he wrote under Henry and Edward would be of another color than under the Marian rule. His gayety and his gravity offuscate one another; and the readers of his longsome fiction, or his dark parallel, were puzzled, even among his contemporaries, to know in what sense to receive them. Sympathizing with "the fly," and not uncourteous to "the spider," our author has shown the danger of combining the burlesque with the serious; and thus it happened that the most facetious genius could occupy twenty years in compounding by fits and starts a dull poem which neither party pretended rightly to understand.

ROGER ASCHAM.

It would, perhaps, have surprised Roger Ascham, the scholar of a learned age, and a Greek professor, that the history of English literature might open with his name; for in his English writings he had formed no premeditated work, designed for posterity as well as his own times. The subjects he has written on were solely suggested by the occasion, and incurred the slight of the cavillers of his day, who had not yet learned that humble titles may conceal performances which exceed their promise, and that trifles cease to be trivial in the workmanship of genius.

An apology for a favorite recreation, that of archery, for his indulgence in which his enemies, and sometimes his friends, reproached the truant of academic Greek; an account of the affairs of Germany, while employed as secretary to the English embassy; and the posthumous treatise of "the Schoolmaster," originating in an accidental conversation at table, — constitute the whole of the claims of Ascham to the rank of an English classic; a degree much higher than was attained by the learning of Sir Thomas Elyot and the genius of Sir Thomas More.

The mind of Ascham was stored with all the wealth of ancient literature the nation possessed. Ascham was proud, when alluding to his master, the learned Cheke, and to his royal pupil, Queen Elizabeth, of having been the pupil of the greatest scholar, and the preceptor to the greatest pupil, in England; but we have rather to admire the intrepidity of his genius, which induced him to avow the noble design

of setting an example of composing in our vernacular idiom. He tells us in his "Toxophilus," "I write this English matter in the English language, for Englishmen." He introduced an easy and natural style in English prose, instead of the pedantry of the unformed taste of his day; and adopted, as he tells us, the counsel of Aristotle, "to speak as the common people do, to think as wise men do."

The study of Greek was the reigning pursuit in the days of Ascham. At the dispersion of the Greeks on the loss of Constantinople, the learned emigrants brought with them into Europe their great originals; and the subsequent discovery of printing spread their editions. The study of Greek, on its first appearance in Europe, alarmed the Latin Church, and was long deemed a dangerous and heretical innovation. The cultivation of this language was, however, carried on with enthusiasm; and a controversy was kindled, even in this country, respecting the ancient pronunciation. A passion for Hellenistic lore pervaded the higher classes of society. There are fashions in the literary world as sudden and as capricious as those of another kind, and which, when they have rolled away, excite a smile, although possibly we have only adopted another of fresher novelty. The Greek mania raged. Ascham informs us, that his royal pupil, Elizabeth, understood Greek better than the canons of Windsor; and doubtless, while the queen was translating Isocrates, the ladies in waiting were parsing. Lady Jane Grey studying Plato was hardly an uncommon accident; but the touching detail which she gave to Ascham of her domestic persecution, on trivial forms of domestic life, which had induced her to fly for refuge to her Greek, has thrown a deep interest on that well-known incident. All educated persons then studied Greek. When Ascham was secretary to our ambassador at the court of Charles the Fifth, five days in the week were occupied by the ambassador reading with the secretary the Greek tragedians, commenting on Herodotus, and reciting the Orations of De-

mosthenes. But this rage was too capricious to last, and too useless to be profitable; for neither the national taste nor the English language derived any permanent advantage from this exclusive devotion to Greek, and the fashion became lost in other studies.

It was a bold decision in a collegiate professor, who looked for his fame from his lectures on Greek, to venture on modelling his native idiom with a purity and simplicity to which it was yet strange. Ascham, indeed, was fain to apologize for having written in English, and offered the king, Henry the Eighth, to make a Greek or a Latin version of his "Toxophilus," if his grace chose. "To have written in another tongue had been both more profitable for my study, and also more honest [honorable] for my name; yet I can think my labor well bestowed, if, with a little hinderance of my profit and name, may come any furtherance to the pleasure or commodity of *the gentlemen and yeomen of England*. As for the Latin and Greek tongue, every thing is so excellently done in them, that none can do better; *in the English tongue*, contrary, *every thing in a manner so meanly, both for the matter and handling, that no man can do worse.*"

Such were the first difficulties which the fathers of our native literature had to overcome. Sir Thomas Elyot endured the sneer of the cavillers for his attempt to inlay our unpolished English with Latin terms; and Roger Ascham, we see, found it necessary to apologize for at all adopting the national idiom. Since that day, neologisms have fertilized the barrenness of our Saxon, and the finest geniuses in Europe have abandoned the language of Cicero, to transfuse its grace into an idiom whose penury was deemed too rude for the pen of the scholar. Ascham followed his happier genius, and his name has created an epoch in the literature of England.

A residence of three years in Germany, in the station of confidential secretary of our ambassador to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, placed him in a more extensive field of ob-

servation, and brought him in contact with some of the most remarkable men of his times. It is much to be regretted that the diary he kept has never been recovered. That Ascham was inquisitive, and, moreover, a profound observer at an interesting crisis in modern history, and that he held a constant intercourse with great characters, and obtained much secret history both of persons and of transactions, fully appears in his admirable "Report of the Affairs and State of Germany, and the Emperor Charles's Court." This "Report" was but a chance communication to a friend, though it is composed with great care. Ascham has developed with a firm and masterly hand the complicated intrigues of the various powers, when Charles the Fifth seemed to give laws to Germany and Italy. This emperor was in peace with all the world in 1550; and, in less than two years after, he was compelled to fly from Germany, surrounded by secret enemies. Ascham has traced the discontents of the minor courts of Italian dukes and German princes, who gradually deserted the haughty autocrat; an event which finally led to the emperor's resignation. It is a moral tale of princes openly countenancing quietness, and "privily brewing debate," — a deep catastrophe for the study of the political student. Ascham has explained the double game of the court of Rome, under the ambitious and restless Julius the Third, who, playing the emperor against the French monarch, and the French monarch against the emperor, worked himself into that intricate net of general misery, spun out of his own crafty ambidexterity. This precious fragment of secret history might have offered new views and many strokes of character to the modern historian, Robertson, who seems never to have discovered this authentic document; yet it lay at hand. So little even in Robertson's day did English literature, in its obscurer sources, enter into the pursuits of our greatest writers.

Ascham's first work was the "Toxophilus, the Schole, or Partitions of Shootinge." At this time, fire-arms were so little

known, that the term "shooting" was solely confined to the bow, then the redoubtable weapon of our hardy countrymen. In this well-known treatise on archery, he did what several literary characters have so well done, — apologized for his amusement in a manner that evinced the scholar had not forgotten himself in the archer.

It affords some consolation to authors, who often suffer from neglect, to observe the triumph of an excellent book. Its first appearance procured him a pension from Henry the Eighth, which enabled him to set off on his travels. Subsequently, in the reign of Mary, when that eventful change happened in religion and in politics, adverse to Ascham, our author was cast into despair, and hastened to hide himself in safe obscurity. It was then that this excellent book (and a better at that time did not exist in the language) once more recommended its author: for Gardiner, the papal Bishop of Winchester, detected no heresy in the volume; and by his means, the Lords of the Council approving of it, the author was fully reinstated in royal favor. Thus Ascham twice owed his good fortune to his good book.

"The Schoolmaster," with its humble title, "to teach children to understand, write, and speak the Latin tongue," conveys an erroneous notion of the delight or the knowledge which may be drawn from this treatise, notwithstanding that the work remains incomplete; for there are references to parts which do not appear in the work itself. "The Scholemaster" is a classical production in English, which may be placed by the side of its great Latin rivals, the Orations of Cicero and the Institutes of Quintilian. It is enlivened by interesting details. The first idea of the work was started in a real conversation at table, among some eminent personages, on occasion of the flight of some scholars from Eton College, driven away by the iron rod of the master. "Was the schoolhouse to be a house of bondage and fear, or a house of play and pleasure?" During the progress of the work, the author lost his patron, and

incurred other disappointments: he has consigned all his variable emotions to his volume. The accidental interview with Lady Jane Grey; his readings with Queen Elizabeth in their daily intercourse with the fine writers of antiquity, and their recreations at the regal game of chess, — for such was the seduction of Attic learning, that the queen on the throne felt a happiness in again becoming the pupil of her old master, — these and similar incidents present those individual touches of the writer, which give such a reality to an author's feelings.*

It is to be regretted that Ascham held but an indolent pen. Yet it were hard to censure the man for a cold neglect of his fame, who seems equally to have neglected his fortune. Ascham has written little; and all he left his family was "this little book" ("the Schoolmaster"), and which he bequeathed to them, as the right way to good learning, "which if they follow, they shall very well come to sufficiency of living." This was an age when the ingenious clung to a patron: the widow and the son of Ascham found the benefits of this testamentary recommendation. It must, however, be confessed to have been but a capricious legacy; for no administrator might have been found to "the will." The age of patronage was never that of independence to an author.

Johnson, in his admirable "Life of Ascham," observed that "his disposition was kind and social: he delighted in the pleasure of conversation, and was probably not much inclined to business." It is certain that he preferred old books to

* There were five editions of "the Scholemaster" within twenty years of its first publication, of which that of 1573 is the most correct and rare. — *Dr. Valpy's "Cat."* It is curious, in tracking the progress of an author's fame, to suspect that Ascham may owe his, in modern days, to the title of this work; for it was a learned schoolmaster who revived the name of Ascham by publishing an edition of "the Schoolmaster" in 1711, with notes, which was reprinted in 1743. His entire works were collected in 1761 by James Bennett, also a schoolmaster, with a Life by Dr. Johnson. There has been a more recent edition, in 1815. "The Toxophilus," the "Manual of Archery," has been often reprinted since the taste for that amusement has revived among us.

pounds sterling; for once he requested to commute a part of his pension for a copy of the "Decem Rhetores Græci," which he could not purchase at Cambridge. His frequent allusions, in his letters when abroad, to "Mine Hostess Barnes," who kept a tavern at Cambridge in the reign of Edward the Sixth, with tender reminiscences of her "fat capons," and "the good-fellowship" there; and, further, his sympathy at the deep potation, when, standing hard by the emperor at his table, he tells us, "The emperor drank the best I ever saw; he had his head in the glass five times as long as any of us, and never drank less than a good quart at once of Rhenish wine;" and his determination of providing "every year a little vessel of Rhenish" for his cronies; and, still further, his haunting the cockpit, and sometimes trusting Fortune by her dice, notwithstanding that he describes "dicing" as "the green pathway of hell," — all these *traits* mark the boon companion loving his leisure and his lounge.

When engaged in public life, a collegiate fellowship appeared to him to offer supreme felicity. He writes thus: "Ascham to his friends: who is able to maintain his life at Cambridge, knows not what a felicity he hath." Such was the conviction of one who had long lived in courts.

But when we consider that Ascham was Latin secretary to Edward the Sixth, to Mary, and to Elizabeth, and intimately acquainted with the transactions of these cabinets, with the sovereigns, and the ministers, and during three years held a personal intercourse with the highest foreign court, we must regret, if we do not censure, the man, who, possessing these rare advantages, with a vigorous intellect, and a felicitous genius, has left the world in silence. Assuredly, in Ascham, we have lost an English Comines, who would have rivalled our few memoir-writers, who, though with pens more industrious, had not eyes more observant, nor heads more penetrating, than this secretary of three sovereigns.

There is, however, reason to conclude, that he himself was

not insensible to these higher claims which his station might have urged on his genius and his diligence. Every night during his residence abroad, which was of no short period, he was occupied by filling his Diary, which has not, in any shape, come down to us. He has also himself told, that he had written a book on "the Cockpit," one of the recreations of "a courtly gentleman." We cannot imagine that such writings, by the hand of Ascham, would be destroyed by his family, who knew how to value them. A modern critic, indeed, considers it fortunate for Ascham's credit, that this work on "the Cockpit" has escaped from publication. The criticism is fallacious; for, if an apology for cockfighting be odious, the author's reputation is equally hurt by the announcement as by the performance. But the truth is, that such barbarous sports, like the bear-baiting of England and the bull-fights of Spain, have had their advocates. Queen Elizabeth had appointed Ascham her bear-keeper; and he was writing in his character when disclosing the mysteries of the cockpit. But the genius of our author was always superior to his subject; and this was a treatise wherein he designed to describe "all kinds of pastimes joined with labor used in open place and in the daylight." The curious antiquary, at least, must regret the loss of Ascham's "Cockpit."

Ascham lived in the ferment of the Reformation: zealously attached to the new faith under Edward the Sixth and Elizabeth, how did he preserve himself during the intermediate reign, when he partook of the favors of the papistical sovereign? His master and friend, the learned Sir John Cheke, had only left for himself the choice of a recantation, or a warrant for execution; but, of Ascham's good fortune, nothing is known but its mystery. The novel religion had, however, early heated the passions and narrowed the judgment of Ascham. He wrote at a period when the Romanist and the Protestant reciprocally blackened each other. Ascham not only abhorred all Italians as papists, but all Italian books as

papistical. He invokes the interposition of the civil magistrate against Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose volumes were then selling in every shop. Baretti strikes at his manes with his stiletto-pen, in an animated passage;* and Warton is indignant at his denunciation of our ancient romances, of which the historian of our poetry says, "He has written in the spirit of an early Calvinistic preacher, rather than as a sensible critic and a polite scholar,"—he who, in his sober senses, was eminently both.

We may lament that the first steps in every revolution are taken in darkness, and that the re-action of opinions and prejudices is itself accompanied by errors and prejudices of its own. The bigotry of the new faith was not inferior to the old. The reforming Archbishop Grindal substituted the dull and barbarous Palingenius, Sedulius, and Prudentius, for the great classical authors of antiquity. The Reformation opened with fanaticism; and men were reformers before they were philosophers. Had Ascham, a learned scholar and a man of fine genius, been blessed with the prescient eye of philosophy, he had perceived that there was not more papistry in the solemn "Trionfi" of Petrarch, and not less "honest pastime" in a "merrie tale" of Boccaccio, than in cock-fighting and dicing; and that with these works the imagination of the public was gradually stepping out of a supernatural world of folio legends into a world of true nature, which led to that unrivalled era which immortalized the closing century.

We must recollect that the bigotry of the Reformation, or that which afterwards assumed the form of puritanism, in their absurd notion of the nature of idolatry attached to every picture and every statue on sacred subjects, eventually banished the fine arts from England for a long century, and retarded their progress even to our own days. A curious dialogue has been preserved by Strype, whose interlocutors

* Baretti's "Account of the Manners of Italy," ii. 137,—the most curious work of this Anglo-Italian.

are Queen Elizabeth and a dean. The dean having obtained some of those fine German paintings, those book-miniatures which are of the most exquisite finish, placed them in her majesty's prayer-book. For this the queen proscribed the dean, as she did those beautiful illuminations, as "Romish and idolatrous;" and with a Gothic barbarism, strange in a person with her Attic taste, commanded the clergy "to wash all pictures out of their walls." To this circumstance the painter Barry ascribes the backward state of the fine arts, which so long made us a by-word among the nations of Europe, and even induced the critical historian of the arts, Winkelman, to imagine that the climate of England presented an eternal obstruction to the progress of art itself: it was too long supposed that no Englishman could ever aspire to be an artist of genius. The same principle which urged Ascham to denounce all Italian books, instigated his royal pupil "to wash out all pictures;" and even so late as the reign of George the Third, when the artists of England made a noble offer, gratuitously to decorate our churches with productions of their own composition, the Bishop of London forbade the glorious attempt to redeem English art from the anathema of foreign critics.

Ascham, whose constitutional delicacy often impeded his studies, died prematurely. The parsimonious queen emphatically rated his value by declaring, that she would rather have lost ten thousand pounds; no part of which, during his life, the careless yet not the neglected Ascham ever shared.

Roger Ascham was truly what Pope has described Gay to have been,—"in wit a man, simplicity a child;" and he has developed his own character in his letters. Latin and English, they are among the earliest specimens of that domestic and literary correspondence in which the writer paints himself without reserve, with all the warm touches of a free pencil, gay sallies of the moment, or sorrows of the hour, confiding to the bosom of a friend the secrets of his heart and his condition; such as we have found in the letters of Gray and of Shenstone.

The works of Ascham, which are collected in a single volume, remain for the gratification of those who preserve a pure taste for the pristine simplicity of our ancient writers. His native English, that English which we have lost, but which we are ever delighted to recover, after near three centuries, is still critical without pedantry, and beautiful without ornament; and, which cannot be said of the writings of Sir THOMAS ELYOT and Sir THOMAS MORE, the volume of ASCHAM is indispensable in every English library, whose possessor in any way aspires to connect together the progress of taste and of opinion in the history of our country.

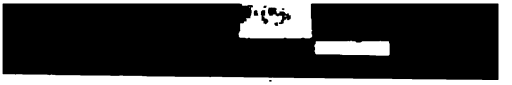
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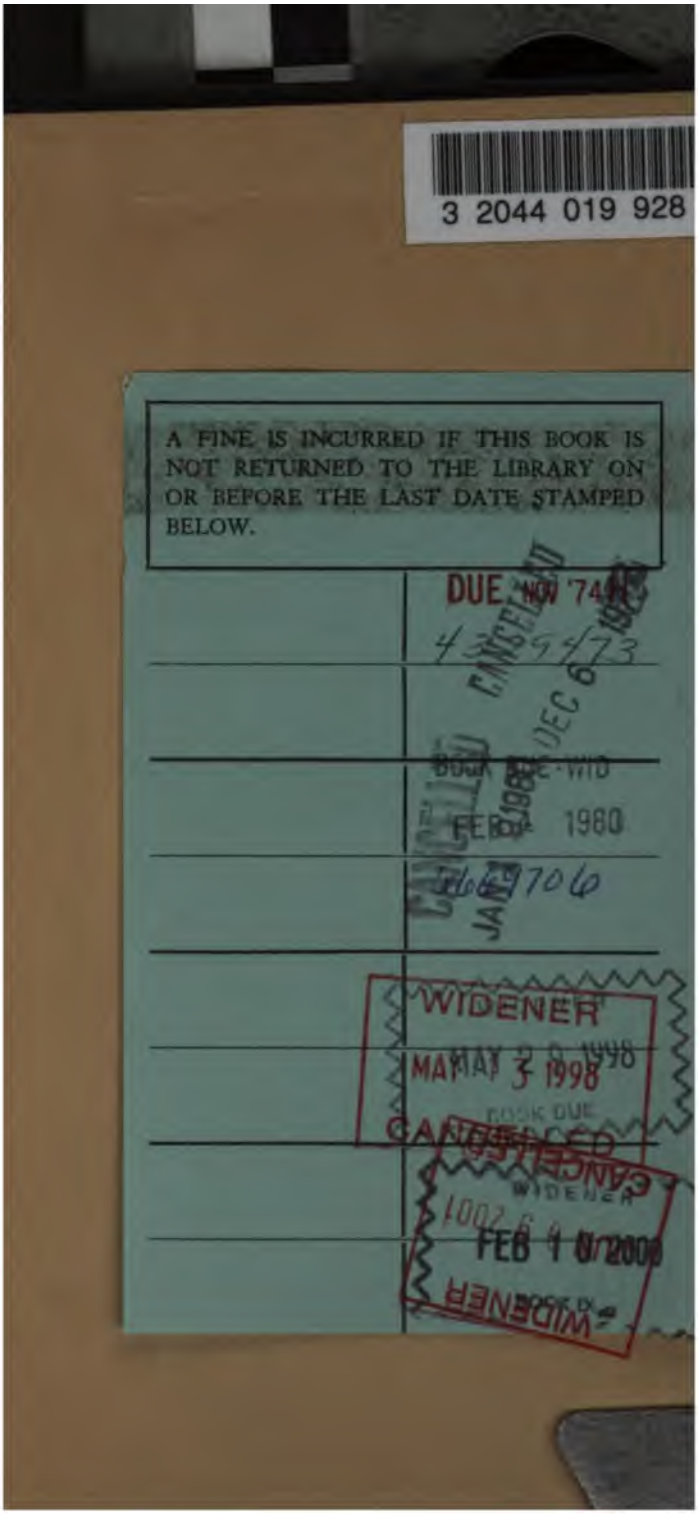
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